The Influence of Yogacara on Mahamudra

Traleg Kyabgon

A unique and interesting look at how Yogacara philosophy influenced the development of tantra and Mahamudra. Developed by Asanga and Vasubandhu as a reaction to over-theorization, Yogacara emphasizes individual experience and practice.

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What is the relationship of Yogacara philosophy to Buddhist tantra? People generally ignore the way Yogacara philosophy has influenced Buddhist tantra and its development. This relationship is never discussed explicitly, even though Yogacara thought is quite patent in the writings of Buddhist tantra. You can easily trace notions in tantric literature back to Yogacara philosophy. Yogacara philosophy itself developed as a reaction to overtheorization and came to emphasize individual experience and practice; hence, the name *yogacara*, which means "practitioners of yoga." Yoga here does not mean twiddling with your toes or practicing asanas; it means meditation. So Yogacara, or practitioners of yoga, refers to meditators. Yogacara, as a system, was developed by two brothers, called Asanga and Vasubandhu. They developed the philosophy in such a way that everything came back to our own practice, our own experience. You could not theorize about Yogacara philosophy without meditating. In fact, you could not be a Yogacarin philosopher unless you meditated. If you look at the writings of the Yogacarins, you will discover that they mention many tantric concepts, either implicitly or explicitly.

There are certain crucial concepts that both Yogacara

philosophy and Buddhist tantra share, such as transforming unhealthy or unwholesome psychological aspects of ourselves into something higher or more elevated. In other words, we do not perceive our negativities, such as the emotions of passion, aggression, ignorance, stupidity, confusion, or whatever, as something to dispense with. We view them as something that should be transformed or mutated. The nature of our psychological makeup is not altered; however, the way these negativities manifest becomes completely different. That is a very important tantric concept, as many of you may know. Transforming our neuroses and emotional instabilities is very much a part of the tantric approach. We do not reject what is bothering us; we learn to accept and transform it. We can, in fact, trace those ideas to the original Yogacarin writings.

Another very important concept that is also common to Yogacara philosophy and to Buddhist tantra is the emphasis on the enlightened nature of every human being. Both the Yogacara and tantric schools emphasize the fact that every single human being is fundamentally enlightened. Ignorance and confusion are totally incidental to that fundamental awakened state; they are not at all intrinsic to human nature. Human nature is held to be totally enlightened and sane, and no amount of negativity or emotional instability, whatever it may be, can corrupt that basic intrinsic intelligence or basic wisdom—that basic enlightened nature.

In Yogacara writings, that is known as tathagatagarbha. *Tathagatagarbha* actually means "womb of enlightenment." Our enlightened nature exists as a potentiality, just as a womb has the potential to accommodate a being. Every human being possesses tathagatagarbha, this womb of enlightenment. Normally, *tathagatagarbha* is translated as "buddha nature." Buddha nature is actually a Yogacarin concept. Buddhists tend to associate buddha

nature with the Mahayana in general, but that is not true. Not all Mahayana schools go along with that idea. The Madhyamaka school, for instance, rejects the notion of tathagatagarbha altogether, because for them it is just another concept. Madhyamikas reject any kind of metaphysical concept. For them, the tathagatagarbha notion was taught by the Buddha only for beginners so that they will gradually wake up to the fact that Madhyamaka is the answer. It is just a warm up exercise, an *entrée*, whereas the main course has not yet been presented.

The tantric tradition also employs the notion of tathagatagarbha, but it is expressed in a different way. It is called "clear light" *('od gsal)*, which is not a particularly good translation. It is also translated as "luminosity." That is the same concept as tathagatagarbha, because it expresses the fundamental sense of the incorruptibility of human nature. That is an aspect that we will explore further as we go along.

The next important concept is the notion of *shunyata* or "emptiness." Shunyata normally has a negative connotation, where it is taken to mean that things have no any inherent existence or that things have no real substantiality. The lack of that substantiality is known as emptiness. However, in Yogacara philosophy, emptiness begins to assume a positive connotation. That is also true in tantra. Emptiness is no longer regarded as the total negation of the substantiality of things. It begins to assume the role of the absolute, the ground upon which the phenomenal world actually functions and exists. It becomes an affirmative negation.

This is very interesting. Normally, when we negate something that is the end of it. However, in the Yogacarin and tantric conception of things, negation itself becomes the affirmation of something we normally cannot access. Shunyata is a reality we can perceive and tune into—not through the ordinary means of knowledge—but through a higher form of knowledge. As we begin to transform our

negativities into something positive and higher, we also begin to apprehend reality or shunyata in a much more precise way. In tantra shunyata is even called "the unshakable vajra." It is so real and so solid we cannot deny its existence. To say that in strict Madhyamaka terms would be shocking. When the chair you sit on is insubstantial, and the glass you drink from is insubstantial, how could emptiness—something that we cannot even see—be more real and more solid than them? Yogacarins and tantrikas almost, in some ways, substantiate the notion of emptiness. It becomes the ground or the reality upon which the phenomenal or relative world actually exists.

The last concept we could discuss is the emphasis both schools place on the workings of the mind. Yogacarins and tantrikas do not speculate about the world. They reduce both subject and object to the workings of mind. Our understanding of the phenomenal world is due to the mind. Whatever we experience, in terms of subject and object duality, is due to the mind, so mind is the cause from which everything stems. Both schools share that view and say that the mind not only creates subject and object; it also creates samsara and nirvana. The attainment of liberation is due to mind and our bondage to samsara is due to mind. No matter whether we are freed or bound, it is all due to the workings of mind. Liberation can be achieved only by working with and transforming our negative states of mind into something much more positive.

We will go into some detail about all these points in the following chapters so that we can take each point as we go along and gradually try to absorb it. The connection between tantra and Yogacara has not really been discussed enough. As far as the tantric side is concerned, we will not discuss the lower tantras too much, because they are ritually rather than philosophically oriented. We will concern ourselves more with the philosophical concepts of tantra

rather than how you should blow a trumpet or breathe through your nose or construct visualizations. We will mainly concern ourselves the highest tantras or *Anuttarayogatantras*, which are connected with the tradition of Mahamudra. In other words, we will compare and contrast the Mahamudra teachings with Yogacara philosophy and examine how they interrelate and interact.

Questions and Answers

Student: During which historical period did Yogacara philosophy develop?

Rinpoche: Ask David Templeman; he is the historian.

David Templeman: It began in the second century AD and developed until the mid-fifth century whereupon it reached its full flowering.

Dr. Rajapatirana: Dates in Indian history are always a mess. One can never arrive at a correct date. With Buddhist texts, for instance, the only fixed dates are arrived at through the Chinese translations, because we know the Chinese were very good with their records. If we have a translation of a particular text done by a particular date, we know that is the date before which the book existed. But sometimes it's difficult.

Rinpoche: People are not even sure whether there was one or more Vasubandhus, but all those things are secondary in some sense. The date situation is quite interesting, especially for Indians and Tibetans. I don't even know when I was born, and I'm still alive!

Student: Rinpoche, are luminosity and bliss different?

Rinpoche: No. Bliss comes from the realization of luminosity.

Student: Yogacara is often rendered as the Mind Only

school to indicate that the Yogacarins believed that nothing existed outside of mind.

RINPOCHE: The only thing that is outside of the mind is reality, but we will go into that. Reality cannot be conditioned by the mind. Reality is reality. If reality could be conditioned by the mind, it would not be reality because each time your mood changed reality would be changed as well. Yogacarins say that both subject and object are products of mind, but that does not necessarily mean that a chair and a table are in your head. We construct our experience of the world, which means that we do not experience the world as it is; we experience the world as we want to experience it. That is why it is said, "both subject and object are a product of mind." We are unable to perceive reality because our mind is continuously constructing things. Due to certain common characteristics, human beings share a similar kind of world. Nonetheless, each individual's experience of the world is different.

STUDENT: Could you give the Tibetan and Sanskrit words for mind and a more appropriate translation for those terms? "Mind" seems to be a very vague description.

RINPOCHE: We will discuss that further in the following chapters. Suffice to say that the mind the Yogacarins and tantrikas are talking about is not the mind we normally experience. We experience the temporal, linear sequence of our thoughts and perceptions that take place each moment, but something actually provides the ground for thoughts and images to take place. There is something beyond our temporary experience of thoughts and images. The Sanskrit terms for that are *manas* and *citta*. In Tibetan, the term *sems nyid* is used to distinguish the mind that provides the ground for both subject and object, and *sems* is used for that ordinary mind of subject and object. Sems and sems

nyid are quite different. In Mahamudra, especially, that distinction is made very clearly.

STUDENT: Could you explain the term *tantra* and place that in the context of general Buddhist thought?

RINPOCHE: Tantra *(rgyud)* literally means "continuity." We could say that you cannot assign any date to the beginning or end of tantra; the tantric experience is something continuous. You cannot say when it began or when it is going to end because it is a continuous situation. However, it is also called Vajrayana. Tantra is a common expression, which is used both by Hindus and Buddhists; while *Vajrayana*, or the "diamond path," means that the process of continuity is absolutely unshakeable. Again, it is a process rather than the end product of Buddhist practice. It is a continuous journey.

STUDENT: Is buddha nature the same as the atman of the Hindu system?

RINPOCHE: There is a difference. Buddha nature is a philosophical concept, as well as an experiential one, but it is not something solid like an atman. Buddha nature is not an entity of any sort, whereas atman is regarded as an entity. Atman is something that you possess so that you keep on reincarnating. Your personal identity is associated with the notion of atman. However, it is not the case that you know who you are because of your buddha nature nor is it a matter of being able to remember your previous life's experiences due to buddha nature. Buddha nature is just the fundamental condition of being able to become enlightened. The nature of salt is to dissolve but that nature is not a separate entity from the salt itself. Buddha nature is not an entity you possess; it is a potentiality or condition already inherent in you.

Student: Rinpoche, could you give a biography of Asanga and Vasubandhu and how they came to develop the Yogacarin system?

Rinpoche: The traditional biography of Asanga is as fantastic as any biography of the Buddhist masters. Buddhism was dying out in India, and it is said that a Buddhist nun was so overwhelmed by this fact that she slept with a king and gave birth to Asanga. After that, she slept with a brahman and gave birth to Vasubandhu—all in order to preserve the Buddhadharma, mind you. Asanga, from childhood, was inspired to preserve the Buddhist tradition. He decided to become a monk and became familiar with the Mahayana tradition. He would have been trained in Madhyamaka philosophy. Vasubandhu, according to the traditional story, was following Hinayana discipline until Asanga converted him.

Asanga was completely fascinated by the future buddha, Maitreya. He was fascinated to the extent that it drove him into the mountains to meditate in a cave. He would start meditating and wait for some kind of vision from the future Buddha, but nothing happened. He spent three periods of three years in the cave until each time he finally became sick of it, left the cave, and started back home. He would come across some amazing things, like a man polishing a gigantic iron staff. Asanga would ask, "What are you doing?" and the man would say, "I'm just trying to make a needle out of this," and Asanga would think, "What! Make a needle out of that? I must be too impatient."

He went back into the cave and meditated for another three years, but he got sick of it because nothing was happening, so he came out again. He became thirsty, so he decided to drink water from a stream and noticed a constant drip had made a gigantic hole in the rock. He thought, "Even this gentle water drop can produce a great hole in a

rock. I must be totally impatient," and he went back again. Finally, he just gave up and started walking home and, of all things, he stumbled across a bitch with a rotten leg that had maggots crawling in it. Asanga was so moved by the sight of the dog that he cut off a piece of flesh from his thigh and started licking the maggots out and placing them on the piece of flesh so that the maggots wouldn't die, so that they could live on his provision.

Suddenly, Maitreya presented himself in front of Asanga, but he was so engrossed in his task that at first he did not notice. When he looked up, he saw Maitreya, fell on the ground, and started prostrating himself saying, "Why haven't you revealed yourself to me before?" Maitreya said, "Because you didn't have enough compassion." That was it. "You didn't have enough compassion. Now that you have performed this task, I have revealed myself to you." The story goes that Maitreya then taught Asanga the five major Yogacara treatises or philosophical texts. Supposedly Asanga heard all that from Maitreya, so normally the author is regarded as being Maitreya rather than Asanga. After receiving the teachings, Asanga went off and started his own school. Along with his brother Vasubandhu, he wrote some other texts, such as the *Abhidharmasamuccaya*. The *Abhidharmasamuccaya* was not part of Maitreya's texts, it was written by Asanga. That's the end of the story. It's a fascinating one—it's amazing!

Student: Could you elaborate on emptiness?

Rinpoche: Emptiness, according to Yogacara and tantra, means emptiness of both subject and object. It does not mean that emptiness is empty of itself. That is what is normally said, "Emptiness is empty of its own nature." It is not something positive. According to Yogacara and tantra, emptiness is something full, if you like, it is something positive. It is the ground that actually provides for the

operation of the phenomenal world. The phenomenal world could not operate at all if it was not dependent upon emptiness. We will go into that more as we go along and maybe it will become clearer.

STUDENT: That story you told about Maitreya is really fantastic. How should one relate to those sorts of stories?

RINPOCHE: The older stories are of no historical interest at all, but from a practitioner's point of view, they are of immense importance. All those fantastic stories are not told just to entertain you, but to make you generate a certain mood, attitude or emotion. Reading those biographies puts you into the right state of mind to actually be open to the teachings. Otherwise, that openness might not happen. That is why the biographies are dramatized. Even most Tibetans would not believe that all those things really took place, but those things have immense importance from a practitioner's point of view because you begin to realize how important it is to be patient or how important it is to generate compassion. You can understand the teachings then because it produces something in you.

STUDENT: Often you hear people say, "I wish something like that would happen to me." They want these fantastic things to happen and they take them as very real rather than as myths.

RINPOCHE: That's right, but myths have their own function, too. It does not have to be a story about a saint or an enlightened being; it could be a myth about some sea serpent, dragon, or whatever. They have their own function for the human mind. I think that without myths human beings would go berserk. They keep us sane, as well as insane, in some ways. That is why people keep producing more and more myths all the time. Myths are fairy tales for

adults. Within each Tibetan school there are innumerable biographies and autobiographies of spiritual masters, every single one of them completely dramatic. It is interesting. The Tibetans divide the biographies of spiritual masters into inner, outer, and secret levels. When they say a lama gazed at the earthen pot and it cracked, the outer meaning is that people get inspired by such an act, the inner level has a symbolic meaning, and the secret point of view would indicate something about the master's own spiritual experience; it is not a physical act as such. There are those three levels. *Rnam thar,* "biography," literally means "story of liberation." They are really amazing, because they are supposed to tell you the gradual development of the master, how he worked with himself, how he advanced, and finally how he attained liberation.

STUDENT: What does Buddhist philosophy say about time and space?

RINPOCHE: The Buddhist attitude would be that time and space are relative. They are relative to your own concept of time and space. They are not absolute on that level. Our understanding of the concept of time in a linear sense of past, present, and future is incorrect in some ways. In some ways time is circular rather than linear. The absolute notion of time really goes beyond our concepts because relative time conforms to, or is dependent upon, our concepts of time, whereas absolute time is something that we cannot imagine. We cannot even call it eternal or not eternal, in some sense. We will be getting into that as we go along.

STUDENT: I thought the notion of *tantra* meaning "continuity" had more to do with a person's experience of the teachings rather than having any historical context.

RINPOCHE: We could say you are a tantrika even before

you become a tantrika. Whatever you experience would be part of that whole process. Even after you obtain enlightenment, still it would be a continuous process, in some sense. Buddha activity would continue. As an individual experience, that is how it would be. Continuity and the vajralike quality are closely related as well, because they have no beginning and no end and so cannot be broken or interfered with.

STUDENT: How would the Madhyamaka school regard the notion of Buddha nature as inherent?

RINPOCHE: They talk about bodhichitta; they do not talk about tathagatagarbha very much at all. Tathagatagarbha is seen as a carrot for the uninitiated or the immature. Once you grow up you begin to overcome that notion. Bodhichitta really means "the capacity to be compassionate," which is different from buddha nature. Buddha nature is seen as beginningless, endless, pure, and untainted by your confusions. All those qualifications are given, whereas there are no qualifications for bodhichitta. In fact, it is said that absolute bodhichitta is final enlightenment. However, that is a completely different concept than buddha nature. To say that bodhichitta is like this, that, and the other, as the Yogacarins do with buddha nature, would be entirely unacceptable for Madhyamikas. Absolute bodhichitta would be shunyata itself for Madhyamikas. Absolute bodhichitta is not looked upon as positive or negative in the Madhyamaka tradition; they do not speculate about it. Tathagatagarbha has some notion of positive quality. The *Mahayanottaratantra* is full of that. It tries to illustrate tathagatagarbha by using all kinds of images, such as a poor woman, a king, the son of a king, or a blind person discovering a gem in the garbage bin. The text is full of those images.

STUDENT: If you want to change negative energy into positive

energy, aren't you just giving energy to the negative energy and thereby moving away from buddha nature?

RINPOCHE: The transformation takes place without rejecting the negative energies. That's why Yogacara and tantra are different from other Buddhist schools. In other Buddhist schools, as in all spiritual traditions or disciplines, the negative is something to be suppressed or better still disposed of, whereas Yogacarins and tantrikas say that by accepting it, you transform it. You cannot relate to your negative energy by being negative toward it. You respond to your negative energies with a positive attitude, so the transformation takes place automatically, in some sense. As they say, the negativities turn into wisdom, but we will get into that later on.

The Three Levels of Consciousness in Yogacara

Our next subject matter is the three levels of consciousness in the Yogacara system. Yogacara philosophy put so much emphasis on individual experience that it devoted a lot of time to studying the human mind. As a result, Yogacarins formulated the notion of three levels of consciousness.

Substratum of Awareness

The first one is the *alayavijnana*, which was understood as the fundamental consciousness. Professor Guenther translated this as "substratum of awareness." Most of the time, it is translated as "storehouse consciousness." The alayavijnana or substratum of awareness is understood as something that retains our memories, our past impressions. It contains the traces and dispositions and so on. It could be regarded as equivalent to the concept of the unconscious. Another characteristic associated with the alayavijnana is that, in itself, it is regarded as neutral as far as ethical concepts go. It is not positive or negative, not wholesome or unwholesome; it is ethically neutral. For this reason it is said to be indeterminate, which means that it is not defined as either positive or negative.

The Yogacarins came to formulate the notion of the substratum of awareness for a number of reasons, one of which is that Buddhists in general reject any notion of a soul or atman. Yogacarins however thought this left Buddhists with difficulties explaining how a person could reincarnate. If there is only a temporary, momentary experience of self, how can the same person reincarnate over and over?

Another problem is that when a person faints or falls unconscious, what actually makes a person able to identify him or herself as the person who lost consciousness? The Yogacarins thought the traditional Buddhist explanation was insufficient to explain this and that there must be something else besides our momentary experiences. Therefore, another concept had to be formulated. They came to the conclusion that there is something in the background of our conscious experiences that actually retains all of our past impressions, memories, and retro-cognition of past lifetimes. All of those things are possible because of the existence of the alayavijnana, the substratum of awareness.

Egocentric Mentation

The second level of consciousness is known as *manas*, which I have translated as "egocentric mentation." Manas is regarded as psychologically unwholesome, as opposed to the alayavijnana, which is neither wholesome nor unwholesome. Manas distorts all of our information regarding the world, other people, and our own experience. It is therefore loosely related with our egocentricity. Anything that has to do with "me" or "other," any type of egocentric experience, is related with manas or egocentric mentation.

The Yogacarins said this second level mistakes the substratum of awareness for our own soul or ego of some sort and then we mistakenly hold onto that. Traditional Buddhists say the soul does not exist, but when we look at ourselves, the

idea of a soul or individual entity is so strong within us, there has to be some reason why we feel this way. The Yogacarins thought it was due to the second aspect of consciousness, the manas, which hangs onto the substratum as that soul or ego. Both the substratum of awareness and egocentric mentation cease to exist at the time we attain enlightenment, but until that point, these consciousnesses persist whether we are conscious or unconscious.

Vijnana

The third level is known as *vijnana*. By the way, all these terms are Sanskrit. Vijnana refers to our ordinary experiences of sense consciousness, as well as our daily experience of conscious feelings, impressions, and images. We have five sense consciousnesses and a sixth consciousness, which is the mental consciousness.

Traces and Dispositions

When these three levels of consciousness interact with each other, *vasanas* or "traces and dispositions" are dispersed onto the substratum of awareness. The traces and dispositions lay dormant for a period of time until an appropriate circumstance comes about to provoke a particular trace or disposition, which compels us to act. This, in turn, disperses more traces and dispositions onto the substratum of awareness. It sounds like a vicious circle and it is in some ways. That is what samsara is all about, as far as Yogacara is concerned.

There is a kind of psychical determinism proposed here. Unless we begin to become aware of how we leave traces and dispositions on the substratum of awareness, we continuously and mechanically go on producing further traces and dispositions, rather than having the ability to stop producing them. It is not a materialistic type of

determinism, but a kind of psychical determinism. At the same time, there is room for freedom, for free will. If the yogi or meditator chooses to do so, he or she can meditate and look at how that whole mechanism of traces and dispositions and the three levels of consciousness operate. By doing so, the meditator could then supposedly change the course of that whole patterning.

This is the description of the Yogacarin attitude toward how we experience the world and how we operate as individuals without having an ego or soul. To think about this description in terms of a soul is much more appropriate, because the notion of a soul is a metaphysical concept while ego is a psychological notion. There is therefore a difference between the two. When Buddhists in general, and Yogacarins in particular, deny the existence of atman, they are denying the notion of soul rather than the notion of ego. I think there has been some confusion about that in the past. People say Buddhists deny the ego altogether, but ego is something we experience as individuals; it is not a metaphysical concept of any kind. If we made a distinction between pure ego and ego, pure ego would be a metaphysical concept, but the experience of ego is just a natural psychological process.

Without having to take recourse in any notion of a soul, the Yogacarins devote a lot of time to explaining how we can accumulate karma by performing acts of all kinds and retaining traces and dispositions, without having a soul. We keep on repeating that process, over and over again, in samsara. This is an extremely important point, which is why they have discussed it in detail.

Conceptual Paraphernalia

Vikalpa or "conceptual paraphernalia" is another concept closely related to these three levels of consciousness. Conceptual paraphernalia, in this case, is related to the

notion of the dualistic fixation of subject and object, of samsara and nirvana. Any antinomies that may exist in our experience are regarded as vikalpa, or conceptual paraphernalia. It is said that the world we experience comes about totally due to conceptual paraphernalia. Whether it is the experience of subject or object, our whole experience of everything that happens could be reduced to the notion of conceptual paraphernalia. That is why Yogacara says our whole experience of the world, and the world itself in some ways, is constructed by the mind.

This is why the Yogacarins place so much importance on the mind. The mind is not regarded as a blank sheet of paper upon which anything can be written. Mind is assigned an active power to create, to condition and to construct, and not necessarily in a very constructive way. That is how the mind operates, as far as Yogacara philosophy is concerned.

Both in Tibet and especially in the West, commentators have thought Yogacara philosophy was denying the existence of the external world. However, what the Yogacarins were really saying is that reality, as it exists, is outside of our experience. We might be able to experience reality directly through the process of meditation, but as far as our everyday experiences are concerned, everything has to come through our own sensory and interpretive experience, rather than a direct experience of the world. Whatever we experience is distorted through our own making, so we cannot actually talk about what reality is, unless we have sorted out how we actually apprehend the world as we experience it. I don't think the Yogacarins have ever denied the existence of the world in its ultimate sense. What they are denying is that we can actually experience a table or jar of water as it is. What we are experiencing is our own construction of that table, our own construction of the jar of water, our own construction of the world, our own construction of

other people. We do not directly experience the reality of the table, the reality of the jug and so on.

That misunderstanding is the reason commentators have said Yogacarins are just propounding some kind of idealistic philosophy. Idealism, in this case, means the world is completely produced by the mind. Many people think that Eastern philosophies deny the existence of the external world, whereas Western philosophies are entirely materialistic, but that is not the case at all. There have been philosophers in the West who have denied the existence of the world. They may not have called it *maya* or "illusion," but they did nevertheless deny its existence. I do not think Yogacara philosophy can be regarded as idealism, as we understand it in the conventional sense anyway.

Sometimes people say *idealism* is not a very good word; they say it is a battered word because it has been used in so many different contexts and we should use the term *mentalism* instead. Mentalism means the mind has predominance over matter, but I do not think we can categorize Yogacara philosophy under some kind of Western heading. Idealism and realism may be quite applicable categories to apply to Western systems, but before we put any labels on the Yogacara system, we have to view it properly.

I mention this because some books on Yogacara say that Vasubandhu just could not express himself as clearly as Berkeley and that these two philosophers were really were saying the same thing. Those may be philosophical discussions, but I think they are quite relevant here in some ways. Otherwise even practitioners or Buddhists may begin to feel that Yogacarins say the world really is in our mind. If we were to think that way, it would have some influence or effect on our mind as well, on how we act. We might think, "If the world is just a product of my mind, I could do anything, I could go berserk, because all these things are only in my mind." However, that would be really quite ludicrous.

What the Yogacarins are saying is that, due to the common traces and dispositions we share, different creatures see things differently. Animals have their common traces and dispositions and they see things differently. The classic Yogacarin example is really dramatic. It says that hungry ghosts see water as pus or blood, gods see water as nectar, and human beings see water as something to drink. Whether that is true or not is secondary; what is important is the common experience certain groups of beings share in their understanding of the way things are. For instance, people who do experiments on insects have discovered that insects with four eyes or certain sensory organs that human beings do not possess have a different perception of the world. Also, depending on the size of the being, the same object would be perceived differently. Those things take place.

The world is a construction of our own mind in that way. What we experience is a construction of our mind, whether we are hiding behind a table or whether we are a human being seated in a dignified manner. It is not going to make much difference as far as our individual construction of the world is concerned.

Yogacarins are saying that reality is "thusness" or *tathata*. Reality cannot be apprehended unless we work through our traces and dispositions and conceptual paraphernalia. Otherwise, we are continuously going to construct the world in a distorted form, rather than apprehend reality or tathata as it is. Tathata means thusness or "things as they are." We are unable to see things as they are.

If Yogacarins really denied the existence of the world, they wouldn't be calling it "things as they are." What are things? To be able to understand things as they are, we first have to transform our ordinary daily experiences of the world, by refining them, processing them and gradually sharpening our senses, so to speak, to see things as they are,

in their natural state, without constructing or distorting anything that is presented to us.

Questions and Answers

STUDENT: So things are actually neutral, but our mind gives coloring to them?

RINPOCHE: Modern physicists would also say that color and all those things we experience are not intrinsic to the things themselves. The colors we experience are due to light from an object hitting our retinas so that our nerves convey a message to our brain and that is interpreted as a particular color. The color you see depends upon you, your nervous condition, and your psychophysical condition in that given situation. These things are not intrinsic properties of objects. Yogacarins are saying similar things. We do not see things as they are; we see things in ways that are unconsciously constructed. We are conditioned and reconditioned, over and over. We can be so conditioned just in one lifetime. If we believe in reincarnation, what about the last thousand lifetimes? We have been trotting along, seeing things in a more and more distorted sense for thousands of lifetimes, but that distortion does not lie in the things themselves, it lies in the way we construct them.

STUDENT: Some Indian philosophies say that everything is energy or consciousness. Would you comment on that?

RINPOCHE: The only Indian philosophy that would come close to that view would be Advaita Vedanta. They say that ultimate reality is Brahma, but Brahma is not material, Brahma is a spiritual entity, and a spiritual entity has to be conscious. Therefore, ultimate reality would be some form of cosmic consciousness. All the myriad things we experience are just *maya* or "illusions." Brahma, that pure consciousness, on a relative level manifests itself as being

saghuna-brahma or "Brahma with characteristics" and the world is part of that. In the ultimate sense, Brahma is beyond the world and the world is just an illusion. It does not exist. That is what they say. In the Yogacara system, the world exists, but it exists in a purified form. The person also exists, but also in a purified form. However, we cannot make a sharp distinction between the person who perceives reality and reality itself, because reality and the person who perceives it are so intermingled. Not necessarily that they become one, but they are so intermingled, the experience of reality is not as if "I am here" and what I experience is "out there." It becomes a totally intimate perception. That type of perception is called "nondual," which is completely opposite to *vikalpa* or "conceptual paraphernalia," the notion of subject and object, and all that type of thing. We construct more and more, due to our hardened notion of "me" and "other." The more we think this way, the more we construct the world in different ways. In some ways, both subject and object do exist, in the ultimate sense. But then, as I said, it would not be the ordinary notion of subject and object as two different entities that do not really interact, or if they do interact, that we experience as totally different or even antagonistic toward each other.

STUDENT: So we make subject and object two, but in reality they are one?

RINPOCHE: When Yogacarins or tantrikas talk about one, they are not saying the world, and the person who understands the world, are one and the same in the ontological sense. In other words, it is not a numerical oneness, where there are no longer two entities. Oneness refers to our experience. For instance, if you are in love, you can become so close to the other person that you feel you are one with that person. However, that does not mean you have disappeared, that you have become one with

someone else or someone else has become one with you in the numerical sense. The experience is oneness. That is what the Yogacarins and tantrikas would say too. Our experience of the world and ourselves becomes one, rather than there being a real physical oneness or numerical oneness, where there is only one thing and nothing else. Your experience of everything that occurs becomes completely in tune or in harmony, so your experience becomes one with everything. Otherwise, if you were one with one thing, you could not become one with other things. If you become part of something, you cannot become part of something else. If your experience of reality were a numerical oneness, you would become so one with it that you would not be able to relate with your daily situations.

STUDENT: I thought an enlightened person could understand everyone so he would be one with everyone in the whole universe.

RINPOCHE: Oh yes, but that does not mean he is totally one with the universe in a numerical sense. Otherwise, he would not be able to move. If he were totally one with whatever is outside of him or if whatever was around him was him, he would not know whether to laugh or cry.

STUDENT: Buddha said or implied he could know everything about any situation he turned his mind to, but that it was impossible for any being to know everything about everything all at once. That means if he turned his mind to investigate a certain person—his past lives, state of mind or future destiny—he could know all that. However, to know everything about everything is out of the question. It would be a Buddhist heresy to believe such a thing about a person.

RINPOCHE: Yes, that is right, that is the situation. People would like to believe there is such a thing as unbounded

omniscience. That situation really distinguishes Buddhism, in some ways, because no Buddhist school would lay too much claim onto the universe. There is no one person who controls the universe, whether it is God or a saint. The universe is universe and the saint is saint, but the saint could become so much a part of the universe, it could become a fairly intimate experience. However, if we become part of the universe, there should not be any chaos. Seriously, this is not only a theological problem; it is even a personal or philosophical issue. If a person were one with the universe, how could there be nuclear explosions? You would be one with the nuclear bomb. All you would have to do to stop the bomb would be to slow down your blood pressure.

STUDENT: Could you explain whether the alayavijnana is conditioned and therefore impermanent or not? I have never heard an explanation for how memory works either. According to the Sarvastivadins and also the Theravada *Abhidharma* to a certain extent, you have a linear line of dharmas arising and passing away so that it is practically impossible to explain, philosophically, how memory could exist. The alayavijnana certainly is a philosophical concept that accounts for that, but it seems to set up a permanent entity for holding the memories and that would go against the ideas of Buddha.

RINPOCHE: The Yogacarins thought about that as well. They say that the alayavijnana has a longer duration than other forms of consciousness; it would last over a period of a few lifetimes or whatever may be the case, but it is not a solid entity that does not change. It is a conditioned phenomenon, but at the same time, it has that duration, which gives it the capacity to retain memories and traces and dispositions. Yogacarins also say these three levels of consciousness are transformed into wisdom. The alayavijnana, for instance, is transformed into what is known as

mirrorlike wisdom, so there is that possibility of transformation that can take place as well.

It is not as if there is the alayavijnana and that is it. Otherwise, even enlightenment becomes impossible, because if the alayavijnana is there determining what courses of action we should be taking, it becomes impossible to free ourselves. However, that is not so. Through meditation, we begin to examine how we continuously produce further vasanas, further bijas, and all that sort of thing. It is not a permanent entity, such as a soul. At the same time, unlike a soul, the alayavijnana is completely neutral. It is neither wholesome nor unwholesome; it is just a neutral entity of some sort, which is conditioned by time and space.

STUDENT: Would you talk about the fact that in later Buddhism people were enjoined, siddhas especially, to act without hesitation, to act spontaneously? The later siddhas acted totally instantly and spontaneously in response to a situation. How does Yogacara view that? Does Yogacara practice encourage that?

RINPOCHE: Yes, Yogacarins were the ones who actually dwelled so much on the notion of conceptual paraphernalia in the first place. Vikalpa is related to the notion of antinomies or opposites: good and bad, sacred and profane, samsara and nirvana. The Yogacarins said the reason we even experience all this and go through the samsaric process is because of vikalpa. Vikalpa is the basic or intrinsic sickness we have, in some sense. Any notion of health is impossible unless we overcome it.

The great emphasis they placed on that notion might have been the impetus for the tantrikas to carry that into action. The Yogacarins may have used it in meditation and examining thought processes but they did not explicitly encourage people to act spontaneously, even though the implication is there. If you are not judging everything

in terms of good and bad, sacred and profane—not in the practical sense but in the ultimate sense of being obsessed with certain ideas—you will be able to come to terms with those dualities properly. Spontaneity would then be a natural process because you would not be inhibited by your conception of how things should be or how things should be operating. You would begin to respond spontaneously, which is quite different from responding compulsively. If you were to observe a spontaneous person's behavior, their actions might come across as the same; there might not be any difference as far as the external manifestation is concerned. A compulsive person and a spontaneous person might have a lot in common but they are not necessarily identical.

STUDENT: Are the three levels of consciousness additional to, or part of, the five skandhas?

RINPOCHE: They are part of the five skandhas. They all would come under the fifth skandha of consciousness.

STUDENT: Is not vikalpa conditioned by vasanas? If you take vasanas as impressions, there is no spontaneity at all.

RINPOCHE: In some ways, vikalpa is the product of vasanas. Your conceptual paraphernalia comes about due to traces and disposition, so the more traces and dispositions you have, the more conceptual paraphernalia you are going to have. Vikalpa and the traces and dispositions are very closely interrelated to one another.

STUDENT: Could you explain how the whole process works? If you start with the eye making contact with an object so that the eye consciousness arises; how do the alaya, manas, and everything tie in with that?

RINPOCHE: As soon as you see a table, you immediately

perceive it as a table. You do not consciously work it out and say, "This is a table." This is because of your vasanas, because of your past association with that particular object. That is why, if you are presented with an unfamiliar object, first you are baffled and then you look twice to see what it is. We do not have to do that with familiar objects because of the traces and dispositions. We can immediately put things into pigeonholes. Unconsciously, there would still be a feeling of "I" and "other." The table is something other than you. That is the root of egocentric mentation. We begin to construct further things, add further things onto it, dependent on the situation. The table itself could be a quite neutral object in your experience, in some cases, but in other cases, it could assume real importance. In certain situations you might want to kill yourself for a table. Such things do happen. We are constantly evaluating things, either consciously or unconsciously. Those evaluations are connected with both your traces and dispositions and your *manovijnana*. Whatever information we receive from the world is filtered through the egocentric mentation. We are constantly receiving more information because each situation creates a new experience, due to vikalpa. For instance, we have seen rooms like this before, but when you walked into this room for the first time, you formed a certain impression and that is stored in your substratum of awareness.

STUDENT: The three levels of consciousness could give you the impression that awakened mind lies outside of that.

RINPOCHE: I didn't want to present too much information at once, but the concept of buddha nature is even more fundamental than the substratum. Normally, we are mistaken about who we are and what we want to be. Innumerable conflicts and impressions arise due to the fact we have lost our sense of who we are. Buddha nature is just a label,

really, for who you are. It is much more fundamental than the notion of the substratum, because the substratum is part of that whole spectrum of experience that actually distorts our understanding of the world. In some ways, buddha nature or our basic intelligence, is much more intrinsic and close to us than the alayavijnana. In some ways though, they coexist. That is why the tantric tradition talks about *coemergent wisdom*, which means "wisdom and confusion coexist," they coemerge. Confusion, which consists of the three levels of consciousness, is incidental rather than intrinsic. That which is intrinsic is wisdom or buddha nature. But confusion and wisdom have co-existed right from the beginning; it goes right back. While they have always co-existed, confusion has never been able to cloud the brilliance of our basic intelligence.

STUDENT: The lojong practice talks about "resting in the alaya." How can you rest in the alaya if it is infected by vasanas?

RINPOCHE: Because dirty blankets are much cozier! I'm just joking. Resting in the alaya just means that. Instead of receiving further information and filtering the whole thing through egocentric mentation—putting all kinds of labels onto things, categorizing and pigeonholing them—you just let yourself be. When you just be, you are at the alaya level. The alaya is just a container of some kind for the vasanas, so if you rest in the alaya, you no longer produce further vasanas. When you have some sense of your traces and dispositions in meditation, you are not actually producing any more.

STUDENT: What if a thought arises while you are resting in that state; would that be part of buddha nature?

RINPOCHE: In some way, it would be part of buddha nature, because buddha nature can manifest in ordinary

experiences too. When you overcome all of this conceptual, habitual process, you do not stop thinking. You still think, but thoughts are not essentially part of buddha nature or something different from it. In some ways, we experience buddha nature in different circumstances. If you were looking at a painting and experience some sort of immediate appreciation of the beauty of that painting, that would be some form of buddha nature manifesting. If you are able to become intimate with a particular object, that could be part of that buddha nature also. It depends on the intensity. Sometimes in meditation, you feel completely relaxed and at ease, but at the same time, your mind is not blank. There is a tremendous clarity and precision, but nonetheless, your mind is not overwrought by conceptual paraphernalia.

Buddha nature is not something we don't experience or don't know about. In fact, there is a fundamental fear of becoming sane. You could say that all these things are part of a running away process rather than anything else. They are not imposed upon us by someone else; we are constantly imposing them onto ourselves. That is part of the self-torture process. Meditation is about being able to come in tune with your basic being, which is buddha nature, and give yourself a break from torturing yourself. It is not something we have no access to. We do have access to it, but only as a flickering thing. Normally, we do not pay too much attention to those things. There is also a degree of intensity within how we perceive or experience that.

Student: What happens to vasanas and vikalpa once we attain enlightenment?

Rinpoche: They get exhausted. An enlightened person still relates to a table in the same way as he did before enlightenment in some ways but in other ways he does not. He would regard the table in the same way to the extent that he would still see it as a table. He would not see the oneness

of the chair and the table and say, "Oh, what's happening? Is this a table or a chair?" To that extent, he would see the table as a table, a chair as a chair, and people as people, but when he perceives something, his perception would not have any emotional overtones as such. It does not have to be a neutral object, such as a table; it could be something very precious or something quite dispensable. An enlightened being would still make that distinction, but he might not want to reject something and accept something else. He would just see things as they are—the table as a table, the chair as a chair. He would not get emotionally overwhelmed or even intellectually bewildered by whatever he experiences. Both those situations happen to us constantly. We get emotionally overwhelmed by certain situations and intellectually bewildered as well. In some ways, the more emotionally intense we feel, the more intellectually bewildered we become.

Buddhas would see those things more clearly than we do, but they would still see the same thing. The difference would be in their understanding. For instance, buddhas would be able to see a jug of water, but they would also be able to see the very nature or reality of that jug, something that we do not see. Buddhas not only see the jug itself, they see its reality; they see the tathata aspect, the thusness aspect of the jug. We have no clue what reality is. That is the difference. Seeing reality does not mean you do not also see the relative nature of the world. You do see the relative aspect, but you also perceive the absolute aspect. They then become united. That is why tantrikas say the phenomenal world in its relative sense and the phenomenal world in its absolute sense are totally united. When the Buddha looks at it, he sees the two truths at once; he sees absolute and relative truth.

Student: There are also qualities that go along with a particular object. There is the flatness of a table or the

redness of the color red, which all humans perceive. Insects might view that differently. How does that relate to the object?

RINPOCHE: We are getting into the discussion of universals and particulars. Some people say a universal has more reality than its particulars. For instance, if you destroy one red object, you have not destroyed redness. If you break a glass, you have not destroyed the "glassness," because there are innumerable red objects and innumerable other glasses. What you have destroyed is a particular red object or a particular glass.

This is really not very important because it is all still part of vikalpa. Even the redness of the object, in some ways, would be part of our vikalpa. The universal aspect is still part of vikalpa, because we decide that something is red, not the object itself. The object does not reveal itself as being either universal or particular. The human being actually decides what is what so that we could have a very neat world. All objects that share the same or similar characteristics can be classified under a particular category, but it is up to us to make that decision. The objects themselves do not reveal themselves as either this or that. From that point of view, universals are part of vikalpa.

Even now, in philosophy, the discussion about universals and particulars still continues. Some people think universals are just human constructions and particulars are real, while other people think a universal has more reality than particulars. In some ways, we could say any kind of philosophical endeavor or inquiry could be regarded as part of vikalpa, because it produces further conceptual paraphernalia. That is why Yogacara says theorization has to be supported by practice. You study all this, then you meditate and examine your mind and see how these things are happening, because they do happen. So we can relate to them in meditation as well as through our intellect.

The Three Aspects of Reality in Yogacara

We need to have further grounding in some of the fundamental philosophical concepts of Yogacara if we are to understand what sort of impact Yogacara philosophy had on Buddhist tantra. What we are going to discuss today also has three aspects. It is interesting that Christianity, Yogacara, and Hegel were completely fascinated by the number three. Whatever they talk about revolves around some kind of three aspects. We are going to discuss the three aspects of reality. According to standard Buddhist thinking, there are only two levels of truth—absolute and relative truth—but Yogacara tends to order the world in threes.

The Notional-Conceptual

The first aspect of reality is known as *parikalpita,* the "notional-conceptual." This refers to the level of reality we talked about in the previous chapter: the three levels of consciousness and how their interactions construct our perception of the world in terms of subject and object. The perception of the world that we have is not really the world as it exists; it is merely our own conceptual construction. This aspect is known as the notional-conceptual. In terms

of ordering the world, it has the least reality of the three levels we are going to look at. The notional-conceptual is particularly related with subject and object duality.

The Relative

The second aspect of reality is known as *paratantra* and could be translated as "the relative." The function of paratantra is to construct the notional-conceptual. It is the act of mind or consciousness. It is the process of perpetuation, of continuously constructing the notional-conceptual through interactions between the three levels of consciousness. The first aspect is just the existence of duality, while the further and continuous perpetuation of that duality is the relative. In fact, paratantra is the most important of the three aspects of reality, because it is on the relative level of reality that the notional-conceptual is constructed.

The Ideally Absolute

Once one begins to meditate and examine the whole function of mind—how the three levels of consciousness interact and how the different traces and dispositions are produced—the meditator is able to remove the notion of subject and object altogether, thereby making manifest the third aspect of reality, the "ideally absolute" or *parimispanna*. The ideally absolute is reality itself. In fact, the relative is the ground for both the notional-conceptual and the ideally absolute. When the relative keeps perpetuating duality, the notional-conceptual persists. However, as soon as the relative aspect is exhausted of that duality, it begins to reveal itself as reality or the ideally absolute.

As far as the Yogacarins are concerned, the ideally absolute (which is the same as emptiness) is something positive, rather than a term that refers to the non-substantiality of the world or things. It has a positive aspect to it. They say that

shunyata—the ideally absolute, emptiness or reality—exists as the nonexistence of both subject and object. That which does not exist is subject and object, but that does not mean that shunyata does not exist. Shunyata does exist.

This positive assertion about emptiness by the Yogacarins has been a target for Madhyamaka critiques of Yogacara. They felt the Yogacarins had misunderstood Madhyamaka thought by attributing positive qualities to emptiness. Chandrakirti, a famous Madhyamika philosopher, criticizes the Yogacarins for doing this. The Yogacarins in turn thought that Madhyamikas fell into the nihilistic position that views everything as empty and thereby denies reality altogether. As a historical development, these two rival Mahayana schools debated this question for many years.

As far as Yogacara is concerned, ordinary human beings add a bit too much reality to whatever they perceive. We believe what we are seeing or perceiving to be reality. Yogacarins therefore said that we fall into the extreme of "accepting," which is another technical term known as *sgro dogs pa*. It means that we add a bit too much reality to the world and believe whatever we are experiencing to be real. Even things that are just constructed by the mind are believed to be properties of the things we perceive. There is some exaggeration involved in our perceptions.

On the other hand, according to Asanga, some philosophers, especially the Madhyamikas, play down the reality of the world altogether by saying that everything we perceive is empty of nature and so do not have any substantial qualities. Things are absolutely unreal in the ultimate sense. According to Asanga, that is *skur pa debs*, which means "rejection." It is to deny the reality of the world altogether, even to deny reality itself in some sense. Madhyamikas say that emptiness is empty of itself so emptiness has no substantial quality. The Yogacarins say that emptiness is reality.

That is how things exist and they exist in a way that has some kind of positive quality.

The Yogacarins regard their view as the middle view, instead of the Madhyamikas, who were too much inclined toward a nihilistic attitude in their perception of the world. As far as the Yogacarins are concerned, once the subject/object distinction is removed, once the workings of the three levels of consciousness are removed, things begin to exist in a harmonious way on the level of *tathata*, "reality."

As we go along, we will discover this has some affinity with the tantric notion of "one-flavoredness" or *ro chig*. Yogacarins are saying that, as far as the ultimate existence of the world is concerned, every single thing has the same nature as everything else, so every single thing shares the same reality. Only one type of thing exists: equanimity. Tantrikas would say everything has one-flavor, which means the flavor of reality is the same in everything. However, the Yogacarins had already developed the notion of the all-pervasiveness of reality within everything, so that in an ultimate sense things exist in harmonious way even if they are opposites.

The idea of "not accepting or rejecting reality" also plays a very important role in tantra. In tantra, for instance, the perception of the world is neither exaggerated nor underplayed or rejected. The world is perceived as it is, without attributing too much to it or underplaying it. We simply try to see it in its nakedness, without any kind of vikalpa. As far as the Yogacarins and tantrikas are concerned, any kind of exaggeration or rejection is part of the play of the vikalpa and consequently the world is not seen "as it is." Tathata is not perceived if one rejects or accepts. They also say that if one begins to accept or reject, either through philosophical discussion or through practice, that only continues our construction of the world to coincide with

our own viewpoint rather than seeing the world in its nakedness, which is the ideally absolute or reality itself.

Questions and Answers

STUDENT: What role does language play in terms of constructing the world?

RINPOCHE: Asanga spent a bit of time examining that. He says that normally human beings misuse language. A lot of the time, especially in philosophical discussions, we use words and mistake words for things. We believe that if there is a word, it must stand for a thing, but it does not. Therefore, we create all kinds of confusion. For instance, Yogacarins say the Hindu notion of atman is utterly meaningless, because if you use the word *grass*, there is an actual object, which that word refers to, but when you say "atman," there is no corresponding object that we can see. It does not even exist. You are just using a word that does not belong to anything. Asanga advises us to be particularly careful about not mistaking words for things. Also, when we misuse language, especially by using words arbitrarily, carelessly, or in an ill-defined manner, we distort the reality of the world as well. That would all be the workings of vikalpa.

STUDENT: I am also interested in how language creates reality for a group. Eskimos have about forty words for snow, so their reality is very different from mine.

RINPOCHE: Yes and there are also common traces and dispositions they share. Different human beings share certain common traces and dispositions, which is why we see things in a particular way. We all have some kind of general consensus, but that general consensus only extends so far. Individual biases come in as well within a particular group, which is related with individual vasanas or traces and

dispositions. In a larger context, there are vasanas that you share with other human beings within a particular group. There would be traces and dispositions that you share with people who come from the same state, and then with people who come from the same country. There are traces and dispositions that people share that way, which actually affects their way of seeing.

STUDENT: People believe the border of a country exists, so they are prepared to fight over it and kill each other. What is happening there?

RINPOCHE: That is due to strong fixation on the dualistic notion of subject and object. Basically, it is about objectifying something that is completely subjective, but at the same time, the person believes it is something other than his or her own doing. That would be part of the process of seeing things in a dualistic way. We get so fixated on that notion; we begin to see everything in that way, which actually distorts our understanding of the world and ourselves. Sometimes, we even create a split within ourselves. For instance, we think of "me" and "my" body, but what does "me" or "my" refer to? The Yogacarins are saying you dissolve that notion altogether because you will begin to become much more accommodating in your perception of the world and then you can have a bit more flexibility, rather than seeing things in a very rigid way. Rigidity is about making a sharp distinction between subject and object and thinking this is how things exist.

STUDENT: Buddhism traditionally has only two levels of reality but the Yogacarins have three. Why do they see the need for three?

RINPOCHE: I think the Yogacarins would say that even the notional-conceptual has its own kind of practical reality.

According to Yogacara, the world we perceive conventionally actually exists, whereas for the Madhyamikas, especially prasangika-Madhyamikas, things do not even exist conventionally. Even on the relative level, things do not exist. The Yogacarins are trying to attribute a bit more reality to the everyday world than the Madhyamikas are willing to admit. They therefore posit the notional-conceptual and the relative. As long as you do not construct subject and object, the relative has its own reality. On a practical level, there are three levels of reality, but once you begin to understand that, there is only one reality: *tathata*, the "ideally absolute."

STUDENT: Why is the relative different from the notional-conceptual?

RINPOCHE: The notional-conceptual is how subject and object exist, whereas the relative is the whole act of creating duality, the workings of mind, the workings of consciousness. To create duality is the relative, whereas the notional-conceptual is the created thing. We could say that the notional-conceptual is the product of the relative. The relative is the act of mind that creates duality. It is called "relative" because it depends on causes and conditions. For instance, for the traces and dispositions to mature or actualize, you need the appropriate circumstances. Your traces and dispositions would not just arise arbitrarily. First, the traces and dispositions would be left on the substratum and then, when the appropriate condition comes about, the relevant traces and dispositions would be actualized or matured. That is the working of the mind and that is the relative. The reason it happens that way is because we have created that duality of subject and object. That is the notional-conceptual.

STUDENT: What practical benefits are there in viewing something, say a concept like food, in these three

categories? Can we lessen our greed and attachment by seeing it in this way?

RINPOCHE: Food would no longer be seen as something "out there," to be acquired, devoured, attacked, or swallowed. You would be able to see it in a more intimate way. You would begin to realize that food is not there to be used for your gratification; it is very much part of a whole process. As you begin to see it in a larger context, you become less selfish because you are working through your traces and dispositions by trying to understand how that whole subject and object situation is constructed by the workings of traces and dispositions and conceptual paraphernalia. You would also become less obsessed with certain foods, seeing some as edible and others as disgusting. You do not necessarily have to eat everything, but at the same time, you may not feel attracted or repelled by certain foods. There is a definite practical situation here.

Also, you might begin to see things much more clearly, because the more we understand the world, the better behaved we are. Practice is important. To eat means to do something, but at the same time, preparing food or appreciating the intricacies of a delicacy is something else. You might be able to eat better if you know what you are eating or if you know what the dish consists of, whether it is French, Chinese, or Japanese. Then you can appreciate every single thing, whereas if you do not know anything about it, you just gobble it up.

STUDENT: The *Sutta Nipata*, which is one of the most ancient Pali collections, has the Buddha saying, "There is one truth, there is not a second." This is directly contrary to the Theravada *Abhidharma*, which has two truths that are very sharply defined and contrasted. Multiple truths may be useful tools but we should not get confused and forget what Buddha said.

RINPOCHE: Almost all schools of Buddhism believe in two levels of truth: the relative and the absolute. However, from the perspective of the absolute truth, there is only one truth. Reality would also be just one. As far as a practical situation goes, there are two levels of truth, or three levels of truth, but that does not alter the fact that there is only one absolute truth. The interesting thing is that all schools of Buddhism believe in the truth of the relative phenomenal world. If the relative world were nothing, it would not be a truth at all. Madhyamikas also must have a certain degree of belief in the existence of the world, because it is true and real, relatively speaking.

Relative truth could be translated as "practical truth" or "functional truth," or something like that because that is what it is. They are not real, but practically speaking, they have their own reality. If you drink a cup of tea, it quenches your thirst. You cannot deny that, but at the same time, as far as reality is concerned, ultimately speaking that is not particularly true. So practical truth or functional truth might be better.

STUDENT: You said buddha nature manifests in the moment of appreciating an artwork. How is it manifesting?

RINPOCHE: It manifests when there is nothing obstructing it. It does not manifest out of something. It is revealed, rather than manifested actually. Buddha nature is revealed to you in moments of appreciating some kind of art or when doing meditation because these are moments when you do not have too much conceptual paraphernalia happening and when you are a bit more emotionally stable. In those circumstances, buddha nature is revealed because there is nothing obscuring it. It is not so much that buddha nature has this active power to manifest. It does not do the manifesting itself; it is revealed when obscurations are removed. In a similar way, when we remove the

subject-object duality the absolute, or tathata, manifests. However, tathata or the ideally absolute has a twin situation: buddha nature on the subjective side and emptiness on the objective side. These are intimately related. Tantra talks about the union of luminosity and emptiness. The reality of the world (which is emptiness) and the reality of the subject (which is luminosity or buddha nature) are united on the level of the ideally absolute. Both have one flavor. They are so intimate; they cannot be sharply distinguished as far as your experience is concerned.

STUDENT: In terms of the relative aspect of reality, unnecessary confusion is created by going on some merry-go-round of the mind, contemplating the negative or conceptual aspects of something. The truth in a situation is probably very simple, but we make it complex and miss it.

RINPOCHE: That is an interesting point, actually. The reason the two truths are distinguished is because we attribute so much reality to things. As Asanga says, we believe something is good and become very dogmatic about it. We hang onto an idea so much we may want to give our life defending it. All those things are just practical situations; they have no ultimate nature. If drinking prune juice is good for you, it is good on a practical level. If you have to avoid certain things, then you avoid them, but not because they have some reality, which we think they do. The less reality we attribute to situations, the more flexible we get so things become less complicated. You will also become much more flexible and open-minded about different situations and begin to accommodate things more. Otherwise, everything becomes so solidified.

STUDENT: It seems ironic that as things become illumined everything becomes a lot simpler.

RINPOCHE: As Asanga said, we have to avoid two situations: attributing too much reality to things and denying the existence of reality altogether. That is the attitude the Yogacarins developed. If you do not exaggerate or underplay what you experience, you will experience what is there. If you dramatize or underplay the situation, you are not going to see it properly because of your vikalpa.

STUDENT: It seems we can perceive truth very easily, but we don't trust that.

RINPOCHE: The Yogacarins are saying we do not want to see. We want to construct the truth and we do that constantly. We want to create something, we want to construct something, rather than really try to see something. You cannot see something if you keep on producing further conceptual paraphernalia about it, because that in itself is obscuring what is there already. Buddha nature is completely intrinsic to us; it is already there. It is our own unwillingness to face up to that which makes us deviate further and further from the whole situation.

STUDENT: All these categories and subcategories seem to be adding to our vikalpa by putting more information into our minds.

RINPOCHE: You conceptualize and do all that sort of thing anyway, even if you do not learn about Yogacara philosophy. It is better to learn something that makes you see how you do that and that will allow you to examine your own mind and see what you are doing. That is more important than just arbitrarily conceptualizing about where you should be going during your holiday or comparing and contrasting different situations. It is true that you are conceptualizing even here, but in this case, your conceptualization is to see how you are actually conceptualizing.

STUDENT: How do you move from conceptualization to actually experiencing truth?

RINPOCHE: Through meditation; that is the only way to do it. Eventually concepts will dissolve because in meditation, we just simply be. First, you learn about it and then you sit and just be. Concepts come and go and you just let them come and go. When you are doing meditation, there is no goal. If you think there is a goal to be achieved when you are meditating you are going to produce further vikalpa. You might begin to torment yourself as well, saying, "I'm not doing it properly" or "I'm not succeeding." Meditation is not something to succeed in; in fact, it is the opposite. In some ways, you are working backwards, you are just simply being. In postmeditation situations, there has to be some kind of impetus to meditate. That impetus might be to work through your conceptual paraphernalia or have a glimpse of your buddha nature, but when you are actually meditating, you simply meditate. You are not there to succeed or do anything. You just look at what is happening and you let things come and go. By doing so, you are already working through your conceptual paraphernalia, because normally, when a thought arises, it is followed by any number of thoughts. One thought leads to another thought and another and so on. However, if you just let be, you are already working through the whole situation.

STUDENT: With Yogacara, you have reality, and then you put a dualistic concept onto that, which compels you to have a view and that gives energy to the idea of self?

RINPOCHE: Yes, that is right, reality is there, but due to our ignorance, our "primal ignorance," as Buddhists would say, we have been constructing our own world from beginningless time. We are continuously doing so. Instead of seeing things as they are, we are trying to construct things, so we are

unable to see things as they are. But reality is there and your own basic being is also there. All those situations cannot be obscured or distorted by our construction of subject and object. We could go and dream forever, but still reality would be reality and your own basic being is your own basic being.

STUDENT: It is easy to say the object is just there and have no concepts about it, but to accept that you are there too, without a subject, is difficult.

RINPOCHE: You begin to become a lot more dignified if you give up the notion of a separate self or whatever notion you have, because your notion of who you are changes constantly anyway. Your notion of who you are is a construction of your own mind and you construct that continuously. So there is really nothing to hang onto anyway. Sometimes during meditation, when you are really relaxed or your mind is at ease, you are not necessarily joyous but just at ease with yourself, then you begin to feel you are actually being what you are, without having to think, "Oh, now I'm really feeling myself." You begin to feel good about yourself without having to actually conceptualize about it. You feel quite at ease with yourself.

STUDENT: Once we know the power of vikalpa and the formation of vasanas, what else is there to know before we actually have to go and do it? How much do we have to know?

RINPOCHE: You do not have to know anything at all, really. No one is expected to know Buddhist philosophy back to front. That would be impossible. At the same time, it is important to know enough of Buddhist philosophy and psychology to know what is really happening so that you know how to relate to those situations, even intellectually in some sense. As Buddhists say, there are two types of obscurations

that stop us from seeing things properly: emotional instability and intellectual bewilderment. Even intellectually, we are bewildered. We cannot make a proper assessment of situations. We correct that by studying Yogacara philosophy or whatever it is, and then try to apply that in meditation. First, we have to know what vikalpa is, why we have it and how the traces and dispositions influence our action in everyday life and how they compel us to act the way we do. Then, when we do meditation, we can see that in a particular context. Traces and dispositions operate in meditation too. For instance, wanting to achieve something or succeed at something in meditation is part of our traces and dispositions. We are not meditating to achieve anything, but due to our habitual tendencies, we think we should always be trying to achieve something. We begin to see that impulse in context. Otherwise, we might not know.

STUDENT: Can anything come out of basic ground?

RINPOCHE: Yes, buddha nature is the ground, but what is manifesting is not necessarily buddha nature. Buddha nature could create the ground for something to happen or create the necessary condition for something to manifest. The same is true for emptiness. Emptiness creates the necessary condition for the phenomenal world to exist. If there were no emptiness or reality, even the phenomenal world would not exist. The phenomenal world exists due to some kind of reality that is beyond these particular concrete objects.

STUDENT: It is easy to see that objects exist because of the space around them, but it is more difficult to understand that both objects and space are empty, that they are actually indivisible. Could you say something about that?

RINPOCHE: The tantric tradition talks about the indivisibility of the phenomenal world and emptiness. The tantric

tradition goes beyond Yogacara philosophy in many ways. Yogacara has had a lot of influence on tantra but Yogacara and tantra are not identical by any means. Tantrikas have gone beyond the Yogacara ideas. For tantrikas, to even talk about overcoming duality would be another type of duality. The fact that you are trying to overcome something means you see it as something that needs to be eradicated, which only creates another duality between you and what you are trying to overcome. You need to transcend that notion altogether.

STUDENT: The Buddha's original teachings did not speak about buddha nature. They speak about attainment, or knowing things as they really are. When that is known, one has got to what is thus, what is real. Until that is reached, it is not known, so there is no such term as buddha nature. Buddha nature, if not very carefully used, could therefore easily become the Buddhist equivalent of atman.

RINPOCHE: I don't think so. Buddha did not actually call it buddha nature, but he said citta or "mind" is very pure and luminous. In the sutras, Buddha said that citta, by nature, is pure and undefiled. That is also the definition of buddha nature. According to the Buddha, mind and consciousness are pure.

STUDENT: He said consciousness is luminous and is known as such by those who are enlightened. However, it is not known by ordinary people.

RINPOCHE: It is the same thing with the concept of buddha nature. Ordinary people would not understand buddha nature. That is why people do not even know whether it exists or not, whereas enlightened beings would know that to be quite obvious. However, I think that whole concept was there implicitly in the early Buddhist teachings. Yogacara made

a big deal out of it. Asanga wrote this huge text on buddha nature called the *Mahayanottara-tantra*. Buddha nature is not at all like the notion of soul or atman however. It is not an entity so much as a potentiality that can be actualized. It is not an entity that exists. It is not the basis upon which we reincarnate either. For the Hindus, it is due to atman that you reincarnate. As Krishna says in the *Bhagavad-Gita*, when you die, nothing really happens to you. All that happens is that you change your garment. He says reincarnation is like changing your clothing or going into a shower and coming out and putting on a new garment. You are the same because of your soul. For Buddhists, we do not take rebirth because of our buddha nature. If we realize buddha nature, we will stop reincarnating altogether.

Student: If the Buddha himself talked about the luminous mind, how is it the Madhyamikas deny it?

Rinpoche: To put it bluntly, the Madhyamikas say that the concept of buddha nature is a carrot for donkeys; it gives us the encouragement to start doing some practice. We think, "Since I have buddha nature, I should try to discover it" and we begin to practice. However, as we practice, we discover there is no buddha nature. In other words, they say that buddha nature has only a relative level of existence; it is not absolute. With the Yogacarins, buddha nature *is* absolute. That is the philosophical difference between the two schools. Nonetheless, even Madhyamikas say your mind is pure, in the sense that mind can be transformed into Buddha's wisdom. The actual concept of buddha nature is very much related with Yogacara philosophy. Zen took that whole notion from the Yogacara school. The reason Zen emphasized mind and buddha nature is due to the Yogacara influence rather than that of the Madhyamaka. Zen relies very heavily on a particular sutra called the *Lankavatara-sutra*, which contains all the implicit ideas

of Yogacara philosophy. The notion of three levels of consciousness, the tathata, and so on are all expressed in the *Lankavatara-sutra*. Yogacara philosophy developed out of that sutra, more or less, and Zen relies very heavily on it.

Student: I feel uncomfortable with your statements about Madhyamaka. Are you only talking from a Yogacarin perspective or would Madhyamika philosophers agree with you?

Rinpoche: I was talking purely from the Yogacarin point of view. Asanga's *Bodhisattvabhumi* explicitly says Madhyamikas fall into the extreme position of nihilism. My own discussion is concerned with the impact of Yogacara on tantra. I am not here to defend any view of my own. I am not here to create a philosophy; I am just here to talk about what the Yogacarins say about the Madhyamikas and what the Madhyamikas say about the Yogacarins. If you listen to Madhyamaka teachings, you will find the same thing, they will criticize the Yogacara view. The teacher would say Madhyamikas said this, that, and the other about the Yogacarins.

If you read Shantideva's *Bodhicharyavatara* you will find a whole section that refutes the Yogacara viewpoint. Chandrakirti's *Madhyamakavatara* is the same. It has a whole section devoted to the refutation of the Yogacara view. When we look at the whole thing from Yogacara viewpoint, we have to examine what Yogacarins had to say about the Madhyamaka position. It is quite explicit that Asanga says this about the Madhyamaka in his *Bodhisattvabhumi*. It is not my evaluation of Madhyamaka, because I have nothing against the Madhyamikas. Whenever we examine these philosophical topics, we have to be quite open-minded. We normally tend to belong to a particular school and try to defend its view, which is entirely unnecessary. That may be due to the influence of the people who taught us, but I think as far as Buddhist

schools are concerned, we have to be able to review whatever school with open-mindedness and then make up our own minds what we think.

Many people do not know anything about Yogacara. The ones who are familiar with Mahayana Buddhism are vaguely familiar with the Madhyamaka school, but they know nothing about Yogacara, and they are especially ignorant of the relationship of Yogacara to Buddhist tantra. Whenever we make reference to the Madhyamaka during these discussions, it will be purely from the Yogacara viewpoint. I do not have the authority to say that what Madhyamaka is saying is true or not. How can I say that? If I did, I would be saying that Nagarjuna got it all wrong. That is impossible, because Nagarjuna is regarded as a bodhisattva; he is someone who has the respect of all Mahayana Buddhists be they Chinese, Japanese, or Tibetan. When we look at a philosophical system, we have to look at it from a completely nonbiased viewpoint. When we are presenting the Yogacara view, we cannot therefore look at it from a Madhyamaka viewpoint.

Introduction to Mahamudra

As we have been finding out, Yogacara has had more of a philosophical impact on tantra than a practical one, so we now turn our concern to the Mahamudra tradition, which actually belongs to the highest level of tantra. Most of the lower tantras do not tend to have much of a philosophical background, but are more ritually oriented. The Mahamudra tradition says the recitation of mantras, the visualization of mandalas and so on only enhance our practice or help lead us to a level where we are able to understand Mahamudra. On the level of Mahamudra, rituals are fully transcended. Saraha says practitioners of mahamudra no longer have to fiddle with mandalas and mantras; they have only to understand the nature of their own mind. Once we have understood that or had some experience of that, we no longer need to concern ourselves with the visualization of deities and that sort of thing.

The Mahamudra tradition did not borrow every single philosophical concept from Yogacara either, but they did borrow a great deal. That in itself is good enough reason to go into this topic. Madhyamaka philosophy also influenced and impacted on Buddhist tantra, but we do not have time to go into its influence here because it is outside the scope of this course. That is just something to bear in mind.

Mahamudra, as a tradition, belongs to the level of

Buddhist tantra known as *Mahayanottara-tantra*. As a concept, Mahamudra is essentially related to the notion of the highest level of tantra. The backbone of the highest level of tantra would be the concept of Mahamudra. Instead of explaining what Mahamudra literally means, we can first find out what Mahamudra really is. Mahamudra has four characteristics: it is all-encompassing, it has no physical characteristics, it stretches across the three times, and it does not come and go.

All-Encompassing

Mahamudra, in some ways, is the equivalent of the notion of tathata. Mahamudra refers to the concept of reality, be it on the subjective side or the objective side. Mahamudra as a concept refers to the reality of the totality of human experience and is therefore understood as all-encompassing. As an experience, mahamudra serves as the ground from which we become inspired to practice or to seek spiritual freedom. It is also the path upon which we embark and start to practice meditation. Finally, it is the goal to be attained. In fact, an individual can never be free from mahamudra. As the ground, path, and fruition are encompassed by mahamudra in this way, mahamudra is called "all-encompassing." There is nothing that is outside of mahamudra because whatever we do is completely in keeping with that totality. Mahamudra encompasses the whole spectrum of human experience.

Mahamudra is not only associated with the concept of nirvana or things sacred; it is identical with samsaric experience as well. Whatever we experience—ups and downs, depressions and elations—are part of mahamudra so mahamudra encompasses both samsara and nirvana. It cannot be regarded as only on the side of the good and the sacred.

Lack of Physical Characteristics

It is said that mahamudra does not have any shape or color. Normally, when we talk about reality, we tend to attribute all kinds of familiar things, such as shape, color, or personality to it. When people talk about God, they render God as a human being with eyes and arms and a gender. However, as far as mahamudra is concerned, we cannot attribute the same kind of characteristics to mahamudra that we attribute to things, such as a table having certain characteristics, color, shape and so on. Mahamudra is completely different; it is the background from which all these other shapes and colors can actually manifest. Therefore, mahamudra itself cannot be regarded as having these same kinds of characteristics. Mahamudra creates the possibilities for other things to have those characteristics and it also creates the necessary conditions for them to exist.

Stretching Across Time

Mahamudra is also unchanging. Normally, things that have color and shape go through changes—they change their shape, they change their form, they change their color. Something that does not have those characteristics cannot change. Mahamudra is changeless, but nevertheless creates the possibility for change to happen. In fact, if there were not something that did not change, change would be impossible. That is why mahamudra stretches across the three times (past, present, and future). Mahamudra is not in time. Everything we experience is in time but mahamudra is time itself. We cannot distinguish mahamudra from time. Things are temporal and therefore things exist in time. If something is time itself, it cannot have a past, present, or future. Within the state of mahamudra the whole

concept of the three times is therefore unified within the larger whole, which is mahamudra.

It is said that when a practitioner begins to realize this, he or she begins to realize that samsara is not something to be renounced and nirvana not something to be sought. Samsara and nirvana are two sides of the same coin, which is Mahamudra. Samsaric existence is known as "maculate Mahamudra" and the state of nirvana is known as "immaculate Mahamudra." Both experiences are connected with mahamudra. When we have not realized mahamudra and are still wandering in samsara, we still experience mahamudra, but that experience is not immaculate, it is maculate. When we begin to work through our traces and dispositions and our conceptual paraphernalia become processed, we come in contact with the immaculate aspect of mahamudra.

Mahamudra has these two aspects but it is not two. Only our understanding of mahamudra has those two aspects of being maculate and immaculate. That is why tantrikas say samsara is not something to be rejected; our emotional instabilities are not to be rejected and enlightenment is not sought for desperately. We should have the notion of equanimity and one-flavoredness because those opposites are harmonized in the state of mahamudra.

It is said we fail to understand mahamudra because of our hope and fear. Those two situations come about due to our traces and dispositions and vikalpa, but no matter how many traces and dispositions or conceptual paraphernalia we have, they are unable to corrupt the purity of mahamudra. The image often used is that of a lotus. A lotus is born in mud, but when it blossoms, the lotus rises above the mud as totally pure and unaffected. In a similar way, no matter how much neurosis and emotional instability we have the purity of mahamudra remains completely unaffected.

Not Coming or Going

Once we are able to overcome all the traces and dispositions, we begin to realize everything is in the nature of coemergence, that samsara and nirvana coemerge. We cannot say samsara came first and then nirvana came about, or that nirvana came first and then samsara came about, or that emptiness came first and then the phenomenal world developed or whatever may be the case. All those opposites are actually coemergent and have always existed side by side, so we cannot assign any precedence to one thing or the other. That is why they are known as coemergent; they have always been in harmony. It is only due to our own ignorance that we think there are some differences, or that one is higher and the other lower. In the actual state of things themselves, there has never been any kind of conflict at all. Therefore, they are known as coemergent.

The subjective experience of luminosity and emptiness and the reality of the phenomenal world are also coemergent. They are also in harmony. Coemergent wisdom is a coemergent concept of opposites manifesting side by side, without any tension between the two. The concept of coemergence makes it possible for us to understand and appreciate mahamudra. That is what mahamudra really means, according to Milarepa.

In Tibetan, the Sanskrit word "mudra" is *phyag rgya*. *Mudra* normally means "hand gestures." The Buddha's teaching mudra is a hand gesture, but here mudra does not have anything to do with gestures; here it means something like a "seal." When *phyag* and *rgya* are broken down, *phyag* means "emptiness and the phenomenal world are united." They are coemergent; they are totally united and cannot be distinguished from one another. *Rgya* means, "not to go beyond that" because the phenomenal world and its reality are totally in harmony with each other.

They are all-encompassing, and you cannot go beyond something that is all-encompassing.

The whole notion of the phenomenal world and its reality is self-sealed. Something that is self-sealed means no one has to put a boundary to it. The boundary is intrinsic, in some sense, but the boundary is no boundary at all, because the phenomenal world and emptiness are all-encompassing. You cannot go beyond the indivisibility of the two.

That is how the concept of Mahamudra is understood by the tantrikas. As I said, it is equivalent to the notion of tathata in Yogacara philosophy, but we can go into how they interrelate later on. It will be helpful to first understand some of the tantric concepts.

Mahamudra has those four characteristics. The fourth characteristic is similar to the third one really. Mahamudra is not something that suddenly comes into being and then goes out of it; it is ever-present. Mahamudra is reality itself; it is in fact the greatest reality. That is why it is called "Mahamudra," *maha* meaning "great" and *mudra* meaning "seal" so "the great seal." There is nothing greater than that; it is the extreme limit of any kind of reality.

Questions and Answers

Student: From what you have said, it should follow that ordinary human beings and buddhas are not different and that might lead some people to take the attitude that they do not need to do anything.

Rinpoche: Fundamentally, there is absolutely no difference between a buddha and an ordinary person. I am purely presenting Yogacara and Buddhist tantric notions. I am not offering this as a personal view of the whole thing. However, as far as the tantrikas and the mahamudra practitioners are concerned, our obsession with wanting to do something, with wanting to achieve

something, is what obstructs us from seeing reality. We do that every day in our conventional experience. We do not feel comfortable with who we are and what we are and so we always search for something higher or something greater.

Student: Would it be true to say that all we really have to do is let go?

Rinpoche: Yes, fundamentally speaking, that is right. However, according to traditional Buddhist practice, people cannot just jump into mahamudra. People first have to undergo training before they can get to that level. It would be suicidal for someone to jump into mahamudra practice just like that.

Student: How does mahamudra follow from earlier practices? Does one have to see the emptiness of deities or something like that?

Rinpoche: You realize that deities are really a product of your own imagination. Otherwise, Buddhists would fall into the same category as the Hindus, who believe in the real existence of deities. In Buddhism, the deities are used as a psychological tool to help you discover certain aspects of your psyche or consciousness that will enhance your understanding and enhance your ability to see things much more clearly. The recitation of mantras, the visualization of deities and mandalas, and so on are part of that tool. The moment you begin to realize this, you get into the level of mahamudra practice and you have actually transcended that level where you practice Deity Yoga. On the mahamudra level, you do not really do any ritual practices specifically. You can do so but you do not have to do them.

Even in Buddhism, at the beginning a lot of the tantric practitioners really see deities as some kind of big daddy and find security in that. As they develop, that begins to

break down, because the more you understand the deity, the more the deity becomes you. As you recognize that the deities are all the doings of your own mind, you begin to transcend them. That is also true from a chronological and textual point of view. On the lowest level of tantra, you see the deity as the master and yourself as the slave. On the next level of tantra, you see the deity and yourself as friends. The following level is the one where yourself and the deity begin to merge, and then finally, you transcend the notion of deities altogether. That is the really amazing thing about Buddhist practice, as far as the deities are concerned. In other religious traditions, deities are deities; they cannot change. Whatever bounty a certain deity can give you is fixed and the level of practice that you are doing should not make any difference. In Buddhism, all those concepts are relative to your own development.

For example, the five Dhyani Buddhas are also a product of your imagination. If we were to understand them in an ultimate sense, it would become a problem. Each Buddha has a special function; each Buddha represents a purified state of your mind. For instance, Amitabha Buddha represents a purified form of passion. All the deities and Dhyani Buddhas have a definite correlation with a particular negative state of mind. Each deity has that type of characteristic. If they were real beings, each deity would have one ability and one characteristic.

STUDENT: What about the dharmakaya body of the Buddha?

RINPOCHE: Dharmakaya refers to our own subjective experience of the ultimate level of being. The dharmakaya is not something out there to be discovered. It is very important thing to realize that it is a subjective experience. It is the subjective experience of emptiness or mahamudra or whatever you want to call it. Dharmadhatu would be the objective correlation to that. Dharmadhatu is the

mahamudra of the object and dharmakaya is the subjective experience of that. Sometimes they are used almost interchangeably—almost, but not quite. The reason they are used almost interchangeably in the texts is that once you have realized reality, reality and you become so intimate, you almost become identical. Dharmadhatu, mahamudra, and tathata are different terms that refer to the same thing. Dharmakaya would be the subjective side of that.

STUDENT: You would say that the tantric practices are skillful means for training people?

RINPOCHE: It is hard to appreciate something that already exists. Human beings are so obsessed with the notion of acquisition, they want to acquire something new rather than try to discover or rediscover what they already possess. That is why, in the context of the six realms chart, the human realm is said to be characterized by desire. The god realm is characterized by pride. The trait of human beings is the need to acquire things all the time, because we are constantly looking for enrichment from external situations. We are inhibited from discovering our basic nature because we are trying to discover ourselves by looking at external things.

STUDENT: What is the value of concepts like Mahamudra, where an ultimate is said to exist even though we have not discovered it?

RINPOCHE: The value is that you begin to realize that the ultimate is an ever-present possibility that you could discover. It dignifies human beings as well. Instead of saying, "If you do this, you are going to get this," you are being told that if you do certain things, you will discover what you already have. Even though Buddha said you do not speculate about whether a saint exists in nirvana or not, Buddha also said there is an unconditioned thing. There

are conditioned things and there are unconditioned things, and the unconditioned things do not change whereas the conditioned things do.

Buddha was giving some kind of metaphysical view about the structure of the world. Even though Buddha said that to speculate about metaphysical questions is like a man observing a swan that has been shot by an arrow and stops to question where the arrow came from instead of immediately removing the arrow. Still, Buddha did talk about unconditioned things. Mahamudra would be the equivalent of that. Nonetheless, it is also a greater concept in some sense, because mahamudra is said to encompass both samsara and nirvana. It cannot be identified with nirvana alone. Samsara and nirvana become two sides of the same coin.

STUDENT: You could also say that was true of shunyata; that it encompasses both.

RINPOCHE: Mahamudra would be identical with the concept of emptiness because nirvana is empty and samsara is empty. That is also the definition of tathata or the ideally absolute in the Yogacara system. Tathata pervades both samsara and nirvana.

STUDENT: Do you begin to experience glimpses of buddha nature in meditation, and then gradually see the distinction between buddha nature and your negativities dissolve?

RINPOCHE: Yes, that is why the tantric approach has psychological value in many ways. Since samsara is also part of mahamudra, you begin to accept and make friends with your negativities. Tantrikas would say that if you become negative about your negativities, you get into a vicious circle and you would not be able to overcome them. If those negativities are another aspect of mahamudra, you have a different and much healthier perspective to work with.

STUDENT: Rinpoche, this coemergence of positive and negative is still only conceptual paraphernalia?

RINPOCHE: Yes, I think so. To regard them as two sides of the same coin is part of working through your conceptual paraphernalia. Otherwise, we would become too dogmatic, and look at everything in terms of what is good, what is bad, what should be accepted and what should be rejected. If we see the all-encompassing nature of the mahamudra, we begin to gain a very clear picture of the whole thing. When you look at things in that way, you begin to work through your conceptual paraphernalia because it breaks down your rigidity. That is what the tantrikas say.

STUDENT: If mahamudra is all-encompassing and penetrates past, present, and future, are we then bound by our karma?

RINPOCHE: We are bound by karma as long as we operate only in terms of past, present, and future. As soon as we begin to realize that time situations are really created by us, there is no karma to bind us. Karma is self-perpetuated, in some sense. We produce our own karma, but as soon as we begin to discover how we do so and begin to realize that reality encompasses everything, the karmic chain reaction is cut through. We can cut through the concept of karma altogether in tantra, according to the tantrikas. Normally, it is said you attain enlightenment over a period of a few lifetimes or innumerable lifetimes, but according to the tantrikas, you attain Buddhahood in one lifetime. That is another radical view of the tantrikas. They say you can attain enlightenment in one lifetime, but to be able to do that, you would have to burn up all your karmas. They are suggesting that this is a possibility.

STUDENT: You said that it would be very dangerous to practice mahamudra unless you are ready for it. Could

you elaborate on those dangers and the prerequisites for mahamudra practice?

Rinpoche: The prerequisites for mahamudra are the practice of shamatha and vipashyana meditation, understanding and applying Mahayana philosophy, developing compassion and wisdom, and acquiring some grounding in all of that. You can then go on to the mahamudra level. Otherwise, you could go berserk, saying, "Samsara and nirvana are two sides of the same coin anyway, so I will just go and lie on the beach." You might begin to think, "I'm bathing on the other side of the coin of sitting meditation" and come up with all kinds of excuses for not practicing. If you have a proper perspective, you will not fall into any of those sidetracks. You will know what you are doing and what you do will be beneficial. Mahamudra is also dangerous because these concepts are very dangerous. If you say, "We don't have to reject samsara," or something like that, you might just use that approach to snuggle further and further into your own neuroses rather than transcending them. However, with the proper technique and practice, that kind of transcendence is possible.

Student: What is the use of knowing about or understanding Mahamudra philosophy, if you are not ready to practice mahamudra?

Rinpoche: Mahamudra philosophy expands your mental horizon. You begin to see Buddhism in a wider perspective; you begin to see the whole range of the Buddhist tradition and then you realize the kinds of possibilities it holds. I think that would have tremendous practical value too if you are practicing.

Student: Is it possible to practice Mahayana and Vajrayana simultaneously or is that dangerous?

Rinpoche: It depends on how much grounding you have in Mahayana. You certainly do not have to be an enlightened being to practice tantra, but at the same time, you would need some kind of attitude and characteristics that make it possible to practice tantra or mahamudra. When you get into higher and higher practices, you do not give up your previous practices. You carry that whole practice situation as well. You never give it up. In the Hinayana, you learn about shamatha and vipashyana meditation, which are also practiced in the Mahayana. Chandrakirti and Shantideva go into great detail about shamatha and vipashyana, even though their approach is a bit different to the early Buddhists. Mahamudra also involves shamatha and vipashyana practice. There is no clear break from one level to the other. It is a development, rather than a transcendence of one level to the next where you forget about what you have done. You build on what you have been doing so there is no conflict. There would be no conflict between your Hinayana and Vajrayana practice. However, you do need to do these practices in chronological order. First, you do sitting meditation and develop compassion, wisdom, knowledge, and so on, and then you gradually get into tantric practices. You do not have to be an enlightened being to practice tantra, but you do need to have that kind of grounding in the previous two yanas.

Student: What is the difference is between bodhichitta and loving-kindness?

Rinpoche: Bodhichitta just means cultivating the enlightened heart. To do that, you have to practice compassion and loving-kindness, so it is really the same thing. Compassion and knowledge are so important in the Theravada tradition, so important in the Mahayana tradition, and so important in the Vajrayana tradition. They are at the core of the Buddhist tradition. Another thing peculiar to

Buddhism is that all of its schools equally emphasize both action and knowledge. You have to have knowledge and you also have to act. They have to go together. You cannot act without knowing. That concept is so important. They become so important in the tantric tradition that the male and female deities are symbolic representations of knowledge and action. The males represent action and the females represent knowledge. It is really the same, no matter what we call it: bodhichitta, metta, or karuna; it is all just human beings generating loving-kindness.

Basic Concepts of Mahamudra

We will now turn to some of the Buddhist tantric philosophical concepts as they are presented in the Mahamudra tradition. We will look at how mind is understood in the Mahamudra tradition and at the notion of emptiness in the context of Mahamudra. As far as the tantric approach to mind is concerned, the Mahamudra tradition would go along with the Yogacara presentation of the three levels of consciousness; both traditions share the same viewpoint on that particular subject.

Emptiness

Mahamudra shares the Yogacarin understanding of emptiness in terms of fullness rather than vacuity or something negative. Emptiness is reality, and Mahamudra stands for that reality. However, in Mahamudra it is said that we should not attach too much importance to reality and thereby underestimate the importance of the phenomenal world. The phenomenal world and emptiness are totally united. Reality is not an occult phenomenon that hides behind the phenomenal world; they are regarded as two sides of the same coin. Emptiness is not regarded as something superior to the experience of the phenomenal world. They are seen as existing on the same footing.

One-Flavoredness

The type of attitude one should develop in relation to the phenomenal world and reality is known as *ro chig* or "one-flavoredness." Reality and the phenomenal world, or nirvana and samsara, begin to assume one-flavor, which means that one is not superior to the other. Those two poles are in some ways indistinguishable. When we look at the whole situation in this context, even conceptual paraphernalia begins to become part of the whole process rather than something to be rejected. We have discussed the way that our conceptual paraphernalia inhibits our ability to see reality, but the Mahamudra view is that we have to integrate our conceptual paraphernalia rather than reject it. Through integration, conceptual paraphernalia begins to reveal itself as part of Mahamudra. That is why we should regard conceptual paraphernalia and buddha nature, which is the opposite of conceptual paraphernalia, as having one-flavor.

We need to have that one-flavored attitude because whatever we experience, be it samsara or nirvana, is all conditioned and constructed by the mind. Once we begin to understand what mind is all about, we start to realize that everything has one-flavor. Reality permeates everything, so there is absolutely no distinction on the level of reality. It is said that all opposites, such as body and mind, the phenomenal world and emptiness, samsara and nirvana, should be regarded as having one-flavor as far as reality is concerned. As far as essence is concerned, there is absolutely no distinction. Any such distinction is simply projected onto them by the mind through its conceptual paraphernalia, but reality as it exists is completely free from that. The distinctions we make are only there due to the constructions of mind. By developing the attitude of one-flavoredness we are able to see reality as it is, instead of only seeing it in a fragmented way through our mental constructions.

Mind-As-Such

The mind that mahamudra practitioners are concerned about is not the mind we normally experience. They call it "mind-as-such" *(sems nyid)*. It is not the empirical mind that we experience or the mind we talked about during our discussion of Yogacara philosophy. Mind-as-such refers to the background of all our experiences, conscious as well as unconscious; it is at the foundation of all our mental functions. Mind-as-such refers to the actuality of the mind. It creates the possibility for all mental functions to take place. In Yogacara philosophy, that is expressed as buddha nature. Buddha nature and mind-as-such could be regarded as quite similar. Mind-as-such is at the foundation of all mental constructions and all the experiences of samsara and nirvana take place because of it.

Mind is assigned a very important place in the Mahamudra tradition, but the mind they are talking about is not mind as we normally experience it, either in our conscious or unconscious states. We wander in samsara because we do not understand our mind and we get liberated from samsara because we do understand our mind. Therefore, everything is due to the workings of mind. Mahamudra has the expression, "the wizardry of mind," which means that mind creates all kinds of things for us as far as samsaric and nirvanic experiences are concerned. Mahamudra practitioners say that to think nirvana is more real or more sacred than samsara or that samsara is something less than nirvana is to be totally mistaken. Both samsara and nirvana are the workings of the wizardry of mind.

That type of mind cannot be discovered through intellectual exercises; it can only be discovered through meditation. No amount of intellectual exercise is going to reveal it to us. Sems nyid is not solid like an entity; it is empty. So even mind-as-such is permeated by emptiness. Because it is

empty, it is able to create flexibility as well as the situation for both samsaric and nirvanic experiences.

The concept of emptiness in Mahamudra has a much more positive connotation. It is called *rnam kun mchog ldan gyi stong pa nyid*, which literally translated would mean "ever-perfect emptiness." Emptiness is not only the lack of substantiality of the phenomenal world; it is something totally unshakeable and pure. It has *always* been perfect. The lack of substantiality expresses itself as something completely pure, so it is a kind of fullness rather than a vacuity of some sort.

Mind-as-such is permeated by that, so again, we come back to this whole notion of subjective and objective experiences. On the subjective side, we have mind-as-such, which is equivalent to buddha nature. On the objective side, we have ever-perfect emptiness, which is completely pure. The subjective side has never been afflicted by our emotional instabilities, neuroses, and so on, and the objective side is the ever-perfect emptiness, which has also been completely pure. We discover that ever-perfect emptiness also permeates mind-as-such, so mind-as-such is also empty.

Alpha Purity

That brings about the tantric notion of alpha purity. *Alpha*, in Greek, means "first" and "pure." "Alpha-pure" is *ka dag* in Tibetan, and signifies that mind-as-such has never been defiled right from the beginning, and ever-perfect emptiness has never been defiled right from the beginning. Both the phenomenal world and the subject who relates to the phenomenal world have been completely pure, right from the beginning. It is only our conceptual paraphernalia and traces and dispositions that prevent us from acknowledging that.

As you can see, the concept of alpha-purity really brings about the notion of freedom. Since the subject has never

been affected by his or her own confusion, emotional instability, and neurosis, the concept of bondage or imprisonment is not applicable at all. Imprisonment exists only on the level of the unenlightened state. It does not apply in the fundamental sense, because mind-as-such has never been bound. Our basic nature has never been imprisoned—it is ever free.

Once the practitioner begins to realize that he or she has never been bound, the ordinary experiences of conceptual paraphernalia, confusion, and all the rest of it are "self-liberated." That is a tantric technical term, which is *rang drol* in Tibetan. Once we begin to realize rang drol, we do not even have to push away our confusion, or neuroses, or emotional instabilities. They become self-liberated by themselves. No one has to do anything about them. As soon as we begin to realize our own nature and the nature of the phenomenal world, all the obscurations become self-liberated, they become rang drol.

It has been said by mahamudra practitioners that the mind itself is like the ocean. At the bottom it has always been still, but it is very turbulent on the surface when the wind blows. In a similar way, mind-as-such has never been disturbed. Even though our daily conscious experiences may be turbulent, our basic nature has never been affected by that. Another image they use is that of the sky and clouds. Clouds come and go, but they have never been able to affect the nature of the sky. The sky has always been pure and clear. In a similar way, mind-as-such and ever-perfect emptiness have never been affected by our obscurations. There has never been any imperfection whatsoever. In fact, we could say they have never been influenced by either perfection or imperfection. That is why it is the greatest perfection. That is what the tantrikas say, too. It has never been influenced by anything external to it.

Questions and Answers

STUDENT: Are mind-as-such and ever-perfect emptiness a duality or are they inseparable?

RINPOCHE: They are inseparably united. They are not "one" but they are inseparably united. At the same time, the nature of mind is empty so the nature of mind also has ever-perfect emptiness. In some ways, mind-as-such and ordinary mind are coemergent. They have been present with us together. They have existed together all the time. The phenomenal world and ever-perfect emptiness have existed together also. They are regarded as nondual because they are not one. This is an important concept to realize. A lot of time people talk about oneness, but they do not know what oneness means. Nondual does not mean one. They are intimately united so they are nondual. For instance, when we have not attained enlightenment, we are not buddha. Our mind-as-such has always been present, but at the same time, our confusion has existed simultaneously. They are intimately united, but they are not one. Our confusion and our mind-as-such are not one. If they were one, being a Buddha and being a sentient being would be identical, but that is not so. They are intimately united nonetheless. Nondual refers to the existential nature of the conventional mind and mind-as-such. Coemergent relates to their being, in some ways, a temporal situation. We cannot say that confusion came first and mind-as-such came along later or vice versa. They have been coexisting from the beginning, which is why they are known as coemergent.

STUDENT: The analogy about the mind as the ocean and its waves is interesting. Could you also think of it as having different layers like an onion?

RINPOCHE: The way the layers of an onion exist is quite different. As far as the fundamental nature of the ocean

and the waves are concerned, there is no difference at all. Difference only exists in the way they manifest. There is fundamentally no difference between samsara and nirvana; they have one flavor. We could say the waves and the ocean have one flavor as well.

STUDENT: The concept of one-flavor seems to be saying the mind relates to things as opposites instead of seeing our good and bad actions as a single continuum.

RINPOCHE: The tantrikas are saying that we cannot operate without thinking in extreme ways all the time. What is good and what is bad is relative anyway. Some person might think that killing is good. Many people have viewpoints that others do not go along with. However, mahamudra practitioners are not saying that good and bad do not have any practical value. They do, otherwise we would not be able to operate. However, fundamentally, there is no difference. Good and bad are a construction of our own mind; they are not basic properties of things. Reality actually is not good and it is not bad, it is just one-flavored. That is why reality is called thusness; it just is. Mahamudra means the same thing in many ways. Everything exists in harmony or in equanimity. When the mind is freed from that, you experience ro chig.

STUDENT: What is the difference between the Buddhist view of reality and the Hindu view of maya as a covering over and obscurer of what is real?

RINPOCHE: In Advaita Vedanta, for instance, maya is used as a total obscuration. It is more like hallucination than illusion because the world really does not exist in any way. The world has only come to manifest because of your own primary ignorance. Buddhists generally use the notion of maya as the equivalent to illusion. Illusion does not mean there is nothing there. If you are in a drug-induced state,

you might hallucinate and see all kinds of things that are not there. If you are under the influence of alcohol, you might see a pink elephant or something on the wall, but there is nothing there. With an illusion there is something there, it has just become distorted. Buddhists use maya in that particular sense, such as the image of a rope and a snake. When you mistake a rope for a snake, it does not mean there is nothing there; it just means you have mistaken one thing for another. That is illusion. In a similar way, we do not see reality or ever-perfect emptiness when we look at the phenomenal world, because we are under the influence of illusion. We are mistaking a rope for a snake rather than seeing the rope as a rope.

Advaita means "one without a second." *Advaya* means "nondual." In Hindu philosophy, when they talk about Advaita Vedanta, advaita really means one without a second. Brahma is one. He does not have a right hand man or left hand man beside him. He is it. When Vedantists talk about oneness, they are talking from an existential point of view, about how something exists. Buddhists are talking about how we view things. We are unable to view the one-flavoredness of the whole situation. It is not that reality is obscured by other things and then you discover the oneness. It is our own way of looking at things that makes us see them in a dualistic way.

STUDENT: What sort of attitude can you take to help you become more at ease with your emotions?

RINPOCHE: The attitude of one-flavoredness. That is why mahamudra meditation is about looking at your mind when it is disturbed and looking at your mind when it is at rest and trying to see the one-flavoredness of both experiences. Instead of trying to cultivate a peaceful state of mind, you try to see the one-flavoredness of any state of mind. There is that exercise of switching from one state of

mind to the other or doing a comparison of them both. Sometimes even anger is deliberately provoked and then you look at your anger. Whatever emotion it may be, you deliberately provoke it, look at it, and deal with it. That is the Mahamudra approach to vipashyana; it is not a passive form of meditation.

STUDENT: An object is surrounded by space so it is easier to see the emptiness of space.

RINPOCHE: Emptiness here is not a special concept. It does not particularly refer to space. It refers to the insubstantiality of things. If an object had substantiality, it could not change or break because there would be something ultimate within it. But there is not. That is the lack of substantiality. Mahamudra says that lack of substantiality should not be a negative concept. That is the ultimate, in fact, because it has always been totally pure. Without that, the phenomenal world would not be able to function at all. There would be no change and the world would be static; it would be just as it has been. People could not get born and die. There would be no movement and no sense of time. However, because things do not have any substantiality, they change, they move, they go through all kinds of metamorphoses. As Mahamudra says, emptiness is something positive because it creates the ground for all those things to happen. Without that ever-perfect emptiness, we would not even have a phenomenal world.

STUDENT: Why do we nominate certain things as good and other things as bad?

RINPOCHE: Because things do have practical value and your actions do have an effect on you and on other people. Intrinsically speaking, however, there is no real ultimate good and ultimate bad, which is why the possibility of

overcoming all karmic dispositions is there. You can even begin to overcome your piousness. Not that you have to regress and become less pious, you just become more precise. You overcome your preoccupation with creating good karma and no longer regard it as some kind of bank balance. "My balance of karma is gone, so I must work harder," and then when it goes up, you begin to relax. People operate like that so you overcome that as well.

The tantrikas talk about using whatever negativities we have and transforming and integrating them instead of thinking, "I've got a problem with anger and I should get rid of it," which is taking a very moral attitude toward anger itself. You might be able to suppress your anger or hold it off, but your own moral attitude will still make you have some kind of anger toward your own anger. That is inevitable and it does happen that way. The tantrikas say we should make use of anger. Instead of seeing it as something to be rejected or accepted, you just deal with it as it is, as anger, without putting too much judgment on it. Our habitual patterns are what make us judge it as bad. That is why the *Hevajra-tantra* says, "That which binds you is also that which sets you free." We create our own imprisonment, so freedom is intrinsic in the fundamental sense. You do the same with all your negativities and try to free yourself by making proper use of them.

STUDENT: We consider love to be good and hate to be bad.

RINPOCHE: In Buddhism, first you have to generate love. You have to think that loving is good and hating is bad and begin to develop love. However, thinking that love is good and generating it in this way is a generalization, because we might try to love, but we love in the wrong way and we create more harm than anything else. It does happen that way. Sometimes we say, "Doing this is really good," and that may have very harmful effects. You begin to discover

this gradually and then you begin to go beyond having any rigid ideas about what is really good and what is really bad. Nonetheless, that does not make you stop functioning on a day-to-day level.

Maybe it gets back to philosophical attitudes people have. Many people think philosophy is just for those who have time to do it or who want to dream about the world, but everyone thinks philosophically. Everyone has some kind of moral attitude or moral evaluation. We have an attitude to what the world is all about and we begin to form very rigid ideas about things. That is vikalpa or conceptual paraphernalia. When we talk about morality, it has such an amazing sound. It might send shivers up your spine, but the thing is, even that would come under vikalpa. The tantrikas are saying you could overcome that by having a more positive attitude toward your own negativities, so that you start to become more positive rather than generating further negativities. Normally, we look at negativities with a negative attitude, "This is something to be rejected; I don't want to know about it." If you have a negative trait, you do not want to look at it, you want to get rid of it because it is bad. With the tantric approach, you look at it. You create space for yourself to look at it, which is a very positive thing to do. When we indulge in our negativities, we do not want to look at them, we just want to plunge in.

STUDENT: What are the implications of this philosophy in terms of social action and social justice?

RINPOCHE: You can still engage in social justice without making it an obsession. That is really what it all boils down to. If you break down your rigidity, you can see things much more clearly. Tantrikas talk about actions too and about doing things because they are good for the majority of people or good for someone. Sometimes you might take outrageous actions. In fact, it enhances you to take action.

This approach does not make you passive. Each person has his or her own philosophy and takes his or her own actions, but if you understand the whole situation more and if you are able to work through the whole situation, you are able to see things much more clearly and take actions without any kind of emotional bias or foggy headedness. You are much clearer about the whole situation and you and not emotionally biased or overwhelmed by the situation.

STUDENT: If nirvana is coemergent with samsara, nirvana could not involve final extinction. It must involve continual samsara on a controlled rather than uncontrolled basis.

RINPOCHE: Yes, that is correct. Normally, nirvana is understood as a place where you could commit peaceful suicide. You just go into nirvana and that is the end of your problem. You do not even have to reincarnate. However, according to tantra, you do not stop there. You could live in samsara and still be in nirvana. As we discovered, samsara and nirvana are constructions of our own minds, so a proper assessment of samsara would be nirvana. Even if you attain enlightenment, Buddha-activity is going to continue, according to the tantrikas. The difference is that samsara would no longer be overwhelming.

STUDENT: Why do we have to practice if reality is available to everyone anyway?

RINPOCHE: We have to practice because human beings have this poverty-stricken attitude toward themselves. That is why Buddhists say the principle characteristic of human beings is desire. Desire is the principle trait of human beings, ignorance is the principle trait of animals, and pride is the principle trait of the gods and so on. Human beings always want to acquire something from outside themselves, they are always looking for external enrichment rather than

looking at what they are. Acknowledging your own wealth and richness is so difficult. Even with external things it is like that. Anything you do not have is so precious, but as soon as you have it or have brought it home, you do not want to look at it again. It has lost its significance completely. We are not trying to practice to become other than we are, we are trying to practice to become what we are in a much more meaningful way.

You practice to stop wanting to be this, that, or the other. Everyone wants to be something. Not that they should not be doing what they are doing, but they think, "If I become a good photographer, I will discover myself. I'm going to express myself through my photographs." It does not work that way, but people continuously look at things like that. The Mahamudra attitude is that you are fundamentally awake already. You practice to acknowledge that wakefulness rather than to look for enlightenment, which is to want to be something other than what you are.

STUDENT: How do you deal with things like anger in relation to dealing with other people?

RINPOCHE: Meditation is inevitable. You have to meditate before you can really deal with situations properly. Most of the time, being honest is much better than trying to be polite. For instance, when your anger explodes, it has a much greater impact than if you just acknowledged your original displeasure about a certain situation from the beginning. If you had expressed that, the situation could have been resolved there. When you do not express that, things add up and you might continue to be polite and pretend nothing is bothering you until it finally breaks out and has potentially disastrous consequences.

Tantrikas say that you actually develop sympathy and loving-kindness toward your own neuroses in meditation, which gives you a very different perspective. Instead

of thinking, "This is something I should reject," you actually sympathize with or generate loving-kindness toward your own aggression. You develop a positive attitude that way. Anger is no longer seen as something bad or something that has just come in and overwhelmed you. Anger is created by you. Your mind is creating the anger. A lot of the time we think all these emotions come from outside and decide to stay in us as unwanted guests that gradually tear us apart. In fact, it is you who are doing all of that. It is your own mind, the play of your mind, the wizardry of your mind, as the Mahamudra teachings say. Because we are doing that, we can also deal with it and relate with it. We begin to develop a much more positive attitude if we see anger as part of ourselves.

STUDENT: But we are developing loving-kindness toward ourselves not toward things like anger.

RINPOCHE: You are developing loving-kindness toward yourself, which is very important, because you can then develop loving-kindness toward others much more spontaneously. If you do not accept yourself, you only torture yourself more. If you are a nuisance to other people, they can just leave you; they can avoid you or keep out of your sight, whereas if you are angry at yourself, there is nothing you can do. You cannot just say, "Well, I'll see you later." You have to do something about it because it is part of you. We do not see it that way. We always think anger is separate from us and say, "It just overwhelmed me."

STUDENT: Are you saying that compassion cannot arise properly before the alayavijnana has been cleaned of traces and dispositions and that would have something to do with anger?

RINPOCHE: Yes, that is right, that's the thing. When we switch our attitude toward our anger, that approach is

already cutting through our traces and dispositions. Our habitual way of relating to anger is to become resentful, which is part of the traces and dispositions. If you look at your anger with a much more positive attitude, the traces and dispositions are cut through because your habitual process has been altered. You no longer see it that way.

STUDENT: The tantric teachings say you should accept all your emotions, but other teachings say you have to eliminate desire and ego because they lead to attachment.

RINPOCHE: That is true and that is why the tantric tradition is quite different. We are talking about the relationship between Yogacara philosophy and tantra because Yogacara said quite similar things. It talks about transforming the three levels of consciousness into wisdom and all the rest of it. The tantrikas are very much into that. Other Buddhist schools see negativities as something to be rejected and positive things as something to be cultivated because they are related to good karma and bad karma. Whatever accumulates bad karma should be avoided and whatever accumulates good karma should be cultivated. With the tantrikas, it is different. Tantrikas say you could work through all that in one lifetime, whereas other Buddhists say that it takes many lifetimes to attain enlightenment, arhathood, buddhahood, or whatever you want to attain. It takes innumerable lifetimes to actually attain the final stage. Tantrikas say you do it in one lifetime. That is why the techniques are radically different and the views about that are different as well.

STUDENT: The quickest way to enlightenment is being who you are, but you need to have that ground of emptiness so that you can accept yourself as you are. That sense of emptiness cannot just arise from a philosophy.

RINPOCHE: That is right, but you cannot act without

philosophy. People say, "I'm just going to meditate," but if you talk about meditation with that person, they have some attitude about why they are meditating and why meditation is good. That person is meditating because he has some philosophical view about the whole thing. Even to think, "It's good for me," is a philosophical attitude. That is why understanding different meditation techniques or what meditation is all about is good. It is also good to know what emptiness is about. It might be possible to just meditate and have emptiness permeate your being, but first you have to know what is going to permeate your being. This does not mean everyone has to be a scholar or be intellectually inclined, but everyone has to know what he or she is doing. We do that constantly, anyway. Even when we say, "I don't like this job, I want to switch and do something else," you are making a philosophical statement. In Buddhism, knowledge *(prajna)* and action or skillful means *(upaya)* are totally inseparable. They go together, constantly. That happens in everyday life, all the time.

STUDENT: What is the tantric notion of ignorance and how is it transformed into wisdom?

RINPOCHE: Ignorance and wisdom are coemergent. Ignorance and mind-as-such or basic intelligence or buddha nature are coemergent. We do not have to say, "My mind-as-such is superior to my ignorance," or "My ignorant state is worse than my mind-as-such." That would not be looking at things with one-flavor. Basically, all these things are discussed in the context of meditation. People cannot just go and do tantra. You need a basic grounding in Hinayana and Mahayana before you can do these things. These are very difficult things to do and it takes time. We are just discussing these concepts to get familiar with them and with the kinds of things that are possible by looking at the spectrum of Buddhist philosophy.

Transformation of Consciousness

We have talked about basic philosophical concepts in the traditions of Yogacara and Buddhist tantra. We can now start the comparisons between the Yogacara approach to transforming consciousness into wisdom and the Mahamudra approach to the same thing. When Yogacara or Mahamudra says that the identity of nirvana and samsara are the same, they are not talking about pure identity, where there is absolutely no difference at all. The identity lies in their facticity *(ngo wo)*, but there *is* a difference in their actuality *(rang zhin)*. If there were absolutely no difference, we would experience samsara as nirvana right from the beginning. However, we do not because in actuality there is some kind of difference. Ngo wo is the same, but rang zhin is different. That difference also applies to the notion of transformation.

On the level of facticity nothing really is transformed. Fundamentally, our ordinary consciousness is of the nature of wisdom, but on the level of actuality, some kind of transformation has to take place, so that consciousness can be elevated from the ordinary level to a higher level. Transformation takes place on the level of actuality but not on the level of facticity. Since there is some kind of difference on the level of actuality, the three levels of consciousness have to be transformed or transmuted into different aspects of wisdom.

Mirrorlike Wisdom

Of the three levels of consciousness, the substratum of awareness is transformed into mirrorlike wisdom. In the Yogacara tradition, mirrorlike wisdom is regarded as the basic substratum of all the other wisdoms. All the other aspects of wisdom depend upon mirrorlike wisdom because it is at the foundation of any kind of wisdom experience we may have. The reason it is called "mirrorlike" is because it is entirely free from conceptual paraphernalia. Our perception of the phenomenal world is therefore totally immediate. Perception is not mediated by any form of conceptualization and because of that, the phenomenal world is reflected in mirrorlike wisdom, just as an object is reflected on a mirror. The mirror does not construct the object, it just reflects whatever is there. Our ordinary type of consciousness always constructs rather than perceives. We do not really perceive things in the proper perspective, because as soon as we perceive something, we immediately construct something or other out of our immediate perception of it. Mirrorlike wisdom is therefore regarded as a kind of perpetual immediate perception without conceptual paraphernalia.

You may have heard of the five Dhyani Buddhas and the five wisdoms that correspond to those Buddhas, but all those things are of no relevance here. The Yogacarin notion of the transmutation of ordinary consciousness into five wisdoms gave the impetus to the tantrikas to come up with the notion of the five Dhyani Buddhas and their corresponding wisdoms, but that was a later tantric addition. When Yogacara philosophy developed, there was no notion of five Dhyani Buddhas. We cannot completely associate all these terms with the tantric system, but we can trace these tantric concepts back to Yogacara because the Yogacarins were the ones who came up with this notion of transformation in the first place.

The Wisdom of Equanimity

The wisdom of equanimity is associated with the second level of consciousness, or egocentric mentation. "Egocentric," as we know, just refers to the notion of subject and object, while "mentation" means the mental processes associated with that type of egocentric situation. Egocentric mentation is transmuted into the wisdom of equanimity. On the level of egocentric mentation, a person is completely concerned with the notion of subject and object, so that continuous conceptual paraphernalia and traces and dispositions are taking place. On the level of wisdom of equanimity, the person is able to see the one-flavored nature of both subject and object. We could say the one-flavoredness of subject and object, samsara and nirvana, and so on come about because that egocentric mentation is transformed into the wisdom of equanimity. Everything is seen in an equanimous state. Nothing is regarded as superior and nothing is regarded as inferior. Subject and object, samsara and nirvana are all seen from the same point of equanimity, which is to perceive them with one-flavoredness at the same time.

Discriminating Wisdom

This is the consciousness we normally refer to as our mind and it is transformed into discriminating wisdom. The function of discriminating wisdom is to discriminate and see things in their proper perspective. To realize that everything is equal, that everything is one-flavored does not make our vision blurred. In fact, it heightens our vision of the world. Discriminating wisdom makes us see things much more clearly and in their proper perspective. That comes about due to the transformation of the empirical consciousness.

A proper perspective is when a chair is seen as a chair and a table is seen as a table. We normally think we do that, but in fact, we do not. When discriminating wisdom manifests, we have overcome the two types of obscurations that always distort our vision: the obscurations of emotional instability *(klesha-avarana)* and intellectual bewilderment *(jnana-avarana)*. Those two are totally cut through, so that chairs are finally seen as chairs and tables are finally seen as tables, in their proper perspective without the obscurations created by those two mental blockages in the affective and cognitive faculties of mind.

All-Accomplishing Wisdom

The five sense consciousnesses (the eye, nose, ear, taste, and touch consciousnesses) become transformed into all-accomplishing wisdom. Once we have transformed our mental processes in this way we are able to act properly. There is no discrepancy between our actions and our knowledge. Our thoughts and actions are completely coordinated so that we are able to accomplish things on the spot, spontaneously, without any hesitation. This is related to the communicative aspect of an enlightened person or sambhogakaya. We are able to communicate and interact with others because we have attained all-accomplishing wisdom.

The Wisdom of Dharmakaya

One type of wisdom that is missing in the Yogacara system is the wisdom of dharmakaya. Normally there are five wisdoms, but in the Yogacara, there are only four and mirrorlike wisdom is the basis of all the others. In the Mahamudra tradition, there are five wisdoms but the terms are the same. The difference is really just a technical one rather than a difference in reality. Even though the Mahamudra system accepts three levels of consciousness,

the wisdoms are not presented as correlated to these consciousnesses. Consciousness or mind is taken as a whole and the wisdoms are regarded as different aspects of that mind in totality, rather than a one-to-one correlation where a particular level of consciousness corresponds to a particular wisdom. That seems to be the basic difference, which is more a technical difference than a difference in kind or nature.

It is said that we realize mirrorlike wisdom when we begin to experience the mind as luminous as well as empty. Mind is empty but it is not vacuous. Emptiness does not make the mind nothing; it makes the mind luminous and once practitioners begin to experience luminosity and emptiness as coemergent, they begin to realize mirrorlike wisdom.

The wisdom of equanimity comes about when we begin to experience the luminous aspect of mind and the emptiness aspect of mind as having one flavor. They are totally inseparable and one-flavored, and once we realize that, we realize the wisdom of equanimity.

Discriminating wisdom is said to be that the mind itself is insubstantial. Since it is empty it cannot be substantial, but even though it is not substantial, it is able to manifest in all kinds of ways. It has a tremendous ability to transform and manifest into hundreds of different things, and since it can do so, it is regarded as discriminating wisdom.

All-accomplishing wisdom arises when the nature of mind is understood for what it is. Instead of just dwelling on the superficial level of the mind, we are able to get into the depth of our own mind and properly understand its nature. We can then perform our actions properly, precisely, and accurately, which is all-accomplishing wisdom.

The wisdom of dharmakaya is just another name for mind-as-such or buddha nature. Dharmakaya is the optimum level of our being. Sometimes people translate it as "universal truth body" or something like that, which is

completely confusing because how can truth have a body? Dharmakaya is regarded as the optimum level of our being. The reason it is called the wisdom of dharmakaya is because samsara and nirvana have been ever perfect right from the beginning. It is only due to our own misconception and wrong assessment that samsara turned out to be impure and nirvana turned out to be pure. As far as the actual state of samsara and nirvana are concerned, they have been perfect right from the beginning. There has never been any kind of embellishment.

In the Yogacara system, mirrorlike wisdom is the substratum of all the other wisdoms. In the Mahamudra tradition, the wisdom of dharmakaya is at the foundation and all the other wisdoms manifest due to that. That is the situation in tantric iconography as well. However, as far as both Yogacara and Mahamudra are concerned, whether the wisdoms correlate to the Buddha-families or not is of no concern. On the level of Yogacara, tantric iconography had not yet developed properly, so they did not make any correlation and the tantric practitioners of mahamudra went beyond iconography altogether. The interesting thing is that they come together at that particular stage because iconography plays an insignificant role in both traditions. They both place more importance on the basic transformation of the mind and the gadgetries of mandala construction, visualization, mantra recitation, and so on are of secondary importance.

That brings to the end one comparative point in our discussion: the transformation of unwholesome mental states into wholesome mental states.

Questions and Answers

STUDENT: Could you clarify the empirical consciousness and the six sense consciousnesses?

RINPOCHE: Empirical consciousness is the consciousness we understand: the one that does the thinking, the one that experiences emotions, the one that can imagine things, the one that can visualize things, and so on. As far as the sense consciousnesses are concerned, when you see something, a visual consciousness is associated with that perception. When you smell something, a nasal consciousness is associated with that type of experience and so on.

STUDENT: When empirical consciousness is transformed into heightened awareness—is that prajna?

RINPOCHE: You could say that discriminating awareness is a heightened sense of prajna, but discriminating awareness is absolute while prajna is only relative. As you progress on the path, your prajna begins to change. You acquire more and more ability of discriminating awareness. When you attain discriminating wisdom, it does not change any more. Discriminating wisdom is discriminating wisdom. It does not increase, it does not decrease, and it does not diminish. You cannot acquire it and then lose it, whereas you can lose prajna. If you do not continue to practice and attend to that, you could lose your prajna and be back at square one. That is not so as far as discriminating wisdom is concerned. In fact, we could say that it is due to discriminating wisdom that we can actually develop prajna or discriminating awareness in the first place.

STUDENT: Where does luminosity come in?

RINPOCHE: Luminosity of mind is associated with all the other wisdoms. Luminosity of the mind, if you like, is

the wisdom of dharmakaya. You could call it luminosity, buddha nature, dharmakaya, or anything you want, but they are referring to the same thing.

STUDENT: But in its incomplete stage it is prajna?

RINPOCHE: In some ways, yes. Prajna would be more associated with discriminating wisdom rather than the wisdom of dharmakaya. Buddha nature would be the wisdom of dharmakaya.

STUDENT: In Yogacara philosophy, the alayavijnana becomes mirrorlike wisdom and is seen as the basis for all the other wisdoms. Would that particular aspect have to be developed first?

RINPOCHE: Yes. It is at the foundation. It is due to mirrorlike wisdom that all the other wisdoms are able to manifest, whereas in the Mahamudra tradition, it is due to the wisdom of dharmakaya that all the other wisdoms are able to manifest. Instead of having four wisdoms, they have five. The wisdom of dharmakaya exists all the time, according to the tantrikas. That is mind-as-such or luminosity. Those things are just a semantic problem, rather than something that refers to different entities. These wisdoms are not different entities; they are different aspects of the same thing.

STUDENT: What relationship did the vinaya rules have for the practitioners of mahamudra and Yogacara?

RINPOCHE: When Mahayana developed, the emphasis on the vinaya diminished somewhat. If you read the *Vimalakirtinirdesa-sutra,* you will see that the hero is a layperson and a lot of dialogue goes on about how you do not have to be a monk to be a bodhisattva or to attain enlightenment. The emphasis on strict monastic rules diminished somewhat. When it came to the stage of tantra, the

practitioners really transcended the monastic vows rather than simply rejecting them. Tantric literature says that you have to incorporate the three types of vows. Even though they may drink alcohol and cease to observe their strict monastic vows, they still say the monastic vows and bodhisattva vows are incorporated into their tantric vows. It is more a process of assimilation than a rejection of the whole thing.

STUDENT: What are the tantric vows?

RINPOCHE: Their vows are not to be said or publicly revealed. Basically, tantrikas have fourteen vows that they must observe, but the vow of celibacy is not one of them. The tantrikas were nonetheless great scholars and meditators; they were not just a bunch of radicals fighting against the monastic establishment. Some of the tantric practitioners were brahmins that consorted with lower caste women and so on; the local Hindus would definitely not have condoned that. Even to this day it is like that in Indian society. You would get thrown out of the country for such behavior.

STUDENT: Many of the siddhas went through monastic establishments and were kicked out for infractions of the rules. Many of them found the rules problematic but the rules were never relaxed inside the monasteries.

RINPOCHE: As Buddha originally said, his Dharma is like a raft to be used to cross the ocean of samsara. Once you get to the other shore, you do not carry your raft around. You can leave the raft behind and you can leave the Dharma behind on that level. Once you have taken the journey and realized mahamudra, you have left behind all your traces and dispositions, including your Buddhist traces and dispositions, so you are not particularly Buddhist or non-Buddhist. However, to get to that point you first need to have a definite practice or discipline.

STUDENT: Could you elaborate on the concepts of purity and impurity?

RINPOCHE: Purity is when you see the things as they are. There is another very important tantric concept related with that, called *dag snang*, which means "pure perception." You are able to see things as they are, as they exist. Impurity is something that we experience all the time anyway. However, it is said that right from the beginning, even the impure is pure in some sense. Impurity has never existed. Impurity is just the imposition of our own conceptual mind.

STUDENT: The practice of Dharma has to start at some point. Does it begin with the transformation of empirical consciousness?

RINPOCHE: The transformation takes place on the level of the substratum, according to Yogacara tradition. First, your substratum has to be transformed. The container has to be purified so that the contents can become pure. The substratum is a container of some kind, not in a physical sense but in a psychic sense. All kinds of traces and dispositions are retained in the substratum, so if the substratum is purified, the traces and dispositions will naturally dissolve by themselves. The fundamental revolution or change has to take place on the level of the substratum.

STUDENT: Does that happen just through letting the mind rest in its natural state?

RINPOCHE: Yes and by dealing with the empirical consciousness as you go along. You are relating with the empirical consciousness all the time. If you look at your thought processes, your images, and all the rest of it when you meditate, you will be dealing with your empirical consciousness, which influences the substratum. Then you will be leaving fewer traces and dispositions.

STUDENT: The mind can create anything so how do we know that we are experiencing absolute enlightenment if everyone can interpret it according to his or her own ground?

RINPOCHE: Practice without theory leads to extreme devotionalism and to fanaticism of all kinds. Your practice will then become a dangerous situation rather than a healthy one. If you think about what you are doing and learn about the whole thing you will have a far better chance of knowing what is going on and what level your mind is at. You do not have to be a scholar or a philosopher. However, if you just dogmatically practice, thinking practice is the only thing that matters and theorization is entirely useless, you will not go in a constructive direction. As we know, religions have created more problems from dogmatism and extreme devotionalism than they ever have from overthinking.

People who really practice properly transcend intellectual understanding completely. Intellectual understanding is utilized as a device so that you can experience what you have to experience in the proper perspective. The Buddha did not need to keep on studying. A lot of people say we should use Milarepa as an example, because he did not have to study, he just meditated and attained enlightenment. However, that is absolutely untrue. Why was Milarepa hanging around Marpa? It was not just so that he could repeatedly build towers. He received many teachings and studied with Marpa for a number of years. If you know as much as Milarepa knew intellectually, you would be doing pretty well. I do not know as much as Milarepa, even on the intellectual level. His practice outweighed his theoretical understanding, so people tend to exaggerate and say Milarepa just practiced and attained enlightenment in one lifetime. However, if you read his songs, you will see they are not just the gibberish of some blissed-out meditator in a cave. They are vast in scope as well as profound.

First you hear the teachings by listening to lectures and

reading books, then you contemplate what you have heard, asking whether it is true or not, whether it makes any sense or not. Then you have meditation. You should meditate only after you have done those other things. Those things all have to be incorporated so that when you hear or read something, you can only find out whether it is really true or not through meditation. Meditation is used for that. Intellectual understanding enhances your meditation as well, because it tells you to look at how your mind is operating and all the rest of it.

Many people say, "How do I know that what I experience is true?" There is no way to confirm that ultimately, until you attain enlightenment. The only thing for sure is that your uncertainty continually lessens. The practice of meditation and the gaining of intellectual understanding are connected with the notion of trial and error. You make mistakes, you mend them, you make more mistakes, and you mend them. Gradually, you begin to have less and less doubt. Final confirmation can come about only when you are enlightened. Otherwise we would not be confused in the first place. There is always some form of uncertainty in the back in our minds about what we know, but we feel that way less and less as we go along. This is not necessarily due to brainwashing but because what we experience really has produced results and we can feel it, we can see it. Progress on the path is the coordination of intellect and intuition; you develop intuition through meditation and you develop intellect through hearing and contemplation. Those three aspects are brought together.

STUDENT: Can you be an arhat and not know it?

RINPOCHE: If you were a baker, you would know you were a baker. If you were a doctor, you would know you were a doctor. If you were an addled human being, you would know you were an addled human being. An arhat

would know he or she was an arhat. An arhat would not understand the enlightenment of a buddha however and an ordinary meditator would not understand the enlightenment of an arhat. An adult knows what it is like to be an adolescent and a child, but a child has no notion of what it means to be an adolescent or an adult. When you have been through those experiences, you know what you are experiencing. I do not think you could be something without knowing it, otherwise enlightenment would not be enlightenment. It would be total ignorance, it would be like someone hitting you over the head so that you can pass out and experience the ultimate passing out.

Buddha Nature and Mind-As-Such

The concept of buddha nature is identical with the purity of mind. The innate purity of mind is called buddha nature and is conceived of as something unchangeable. Buddha nature, or the purity of mind, does not go through any changes even though it may have all kinds of obscurations and defilements. Defilements and obscurations come and go, but as far as the innate purity of mind is concerned, there is no change at all. Buddha nature is said to be changeless, and at the same time to be luminous. Since the mind is absolutely pure, it is absolutely luminous as well, and radiating.

In the Yogacara tradition, the obscurations or defilements are regarded as extrinsic to buddha nature. The obscurations, which consist of our traces and dispositions, conceptual paraphernalia, and all the rest of it are something we need to remove so that our buddha nature can reveal itself. This is a slightly different to the Mahamudra approach, as we will discover. The mind is covered by the obscurations in the same way that a mirror is covered by a veil of dust that has to be removed. The dust that is caked on the mirror has nothing to do with the mirror. The mirror itself is completely pure. The traces and dispositions, conceptual paraphernalia, and mental obscurations also need to be removed so that the purity of the mind can manifest automatically.

It is said that change and temporality, birth and death, and so on, can come about only due to our obscurations. As practitioners begin to realize that their minds are completely pure by nature, they become completely fearless as far as death and rebirth are concerned. Once the obscurations are removed and the completely unchangeable buddha nature is discovered, they overcome any fear of birth and death.

We could make reference to the *Uttaratantra* here, as this is the most important text on buddha nature. It was written by Asanga, the founder of the Yogacara school. The *Uttaratantra* says that there are four types of people who fail to understand the concept of buddha nature.

The first type of person mistakenly believes in the notion of a soul. Ordinary human beings do not understand buddha nature because they have constructed the notion of soul. Buddha nature is therefore inaccessible to them. They are deluded due to the notion of "me" and "mine," subject and object, and this creation of a basic split prevents them from understanding buddha nature because buddha nature is a totality. There is no subject-object duality within buddha nature. Buddha nature is completely free from that. The notion of soul produces duality rather than non-duality so ordinary beings are prevented from understanding buddha nature.

The second type of person is known as a *shravaka,* which literally translated means "hearers." It means people who really do not understand the teachings that well. It is not that Hinayanists in general do not, but this type of practitioner does not understand the concept of buddha nature, because it is changeless and shravakas are completely obsessed with the idea of change and impermanence. The concept of changelessness is consequently frightening to them and they fail to grasp the reality of buddha nature. Shravakas are also obsessed with the first noble truth and

its maxim that everything is regarded as suffering. They cannot conceive that there could be such a thing as bliss. Asanga says buddha nature is a perfectly blissful experience and the discovery of buddha nature consists of a feeling of bliss. Shravakas, through repeated meditation on suffering, are unable to realize this concept. If we hang onto that attitude, we will also fail to understand buddha nature, because buddha nature is totally pure and changeless. The contemplation of suffering and change only produces further impure states of mind. Buddha nature is said to have those three characteristics—it is supreme eternity, supreme bliss, and supreme unity—even though that reads like some passages from the Upanishads!

The third type of person is the *prateyekabuddha,* who shares the same kind of view as the shravakas. Both of them overindulge in the contemplation of change, impermanence, and suffering, so they fail to develop pure perception.

The fourth type of person listed in the *Uttaratantra* is the Mahayana practitioner who has recently embarked on the Mahayana path and fails to understand the concept of buddha nature because he or she misunderstands the notion of emptiness. I think Asanga is alluding to the Madhyamikas here. That misconception of insubstantiality prevents their understanding buddha nature because they think insubstantiality means total emptiness without anything. However, as Asanga says, insubstantiality is really a positive quality and unless that fact is understood, we will never understand buddha nature. The relevant passage reads:

> Thus, wherever something is lacking, this is observed to be void or emptiness. In that place, whatever remains there, one knows that this being must exist here.

"Whatever is lacking" refers to the duality of subject and object, but it also says that "what is left behind is emptiness," which means that emptiness is the residue of the absence of subject and object. It is not a lack or a complete negation. Insubstantiality is something that is left behind as an absence of the substance of subject and object. Some Mahayanists also get obsessed with the notion of emptiness and are therefore unable to understand the notion of buddha nature because buddha nature is a positive quality. That is how the concept of buddha nature is presented in Yogacara literature.

The same concept is carried over into the Mahamudra tradition. However, in the Mahamudra tradition, a distinction is made between mind and mind-as-such or sems and sems nyid. When the mind is under the influence of conceptual paraphernalia and the traces and dispositions, it is ordinary mind. When mind is free from conceptual paraphernalia and the traces and dispositions, it is mind-as-such. They make that distinction. Mind-as-such is the equivalent of buddha nature because it is complete purity.

The difference between the notion of buddha nature and mind-as-such is that the latter encompasses our conceptual paraphernalia and traces and dispositions. In fact, mind as we experience it, is just a small fragment of mind-as-such. The obscurations are not to be removed; they are to be understood for what they are. In the Yogacara tradition they need to be removed, whereas in the Mahamudra tradition obscurations are not to be removed but are to be understood because their true nature is not separate from mind-as-such. Mind-as-such is all-encompassing, so it must encompass the obscurations and conceptual paraphernalia. In other words, the dust on the mirror is part of the mirror itself, in some sense, because the dust does not obstruct the mirror at all. The obscurations are not regarded as extrinsic to mind-as-such either; they are seen to be part

of the whole thing. Mind-as-such is all-encompassing and encompasses our ordinary state of mind as well.

It is said that mind-as-such cannot be described or conveyed in words because it is ineffable. It is a mystical experience. However, if a description has to be given, we can say that it has three aspects: emptiness, luminosity, and bliss. Mind-as-such is not like a soul. It is not a substance, so it does not have any form, color, or shape. It is totally insubstantial and empty of any characteristics. At the same time, it is not "nothing" because mind-as-such is completely luminous. It not only illuminates itself, it illuminates other things as well. It is because of mind-as-such that we are able to make a proper assessment of the phenomenal world. The realization of emptiness and luminosity brings about the notion of bliss. As we realize the nature of mind-as-such, we begin to feel completely freed and relieved of all kinds of burdens. Bliss is a natural outcome of the realization of the coemergent aspect of luminosity and emptiness. These are the triadic aspects of mind-as-such—emptiness, luminosity, and bliss—the realization of which is the realization of the mahamudra experience itself.

The only difference between buddha nature and mind-as-such is that the latter is not regarded as changeless and eternal. It is described as ineffable and should not be talked about as changeless and eternal. In Yogacarin literature, the concept of buddha nature is almost solidified to the point that it becomes eternal and changeless. All kinds of characteristics are given. The Mahamudra tradition tends to refrain from giving too many characteristics. The tantrikas say we cannot communicate such an experience, because it has to be experienced. In some ways, it is not substantialized as much. In Yogacarin literature, buddha nature almost becomes a substance; it is almost equivalent to the Hindu notion of a soul. That presents a bit of a danger, a danger that has been targeted by Madhyamikas. They

accuse the Yogacarins of putting a new garb on the old Hindu notion of a soul, and I think they have a point, because some of the passages in the *Uttaratantra* really read like an Upanishad.

Questions and Answers

Student: I am confused about the relationship between bliss and emptiness.

Rinpoche: Bliss comes about as a result of the realization that emptiness and luminosity cannot be separated, from the coemergent aspect of those two. The inseparability of those two gives rise to the realization of bliss and emptiness. The reason it is called "bliss and emptiness" is because emptiness is all-pervasive so it pervades the experience of bliss. This is not a solid feeling or something to be hung on to. Bliss comes as a result of the realization that luminosity and emptiness are inseparable.

Student: What does *zung 'jug* mean?

Rinpoche: *Zung 'jug* means "the coming together of two." It does not mean "one." That is interesting because the Hindu tradition would express it as being one rather than as a coming together of two. The Buddhist concept is the coming together of bliss and emptiness. *Zung* means "two."

Student: In one of the Mahamudra songs, someone called Kanha says, "Don't say there is no such thing as Kanha; I am everywhere." People look at that and think that the Mahamudra siddhas were not really too different from Hinduism.

Rinpoche: Since Shankara was outed as a crypto-Buddhist, Hindus have been trying to find crypto-Hindus amongst the Buddhists. It is not a matter of whose concept is better

or worse. I don't think there is any reason to feel that our ultimate experience has to be the same or different. That is totally irrelevant. You cannot say they are the same; just as we cannot say they are different. However, from a practical point of view there is a difference but the existence of difference does not mean anything. It does not mean Hindus are inferior to Buddhists.

Student: There doesn't seem to be much room for devotion to something higher than ourselves.

Rinpoche: That is right, in the ultimate sense, there is no room for devotion. In Mahamudra we are always talking about mind-as-such, which is a subjective experience rather than some kind of entity out there with which we can merge and become united. There is no real encouragement coming from outside. That is why Buddhism is non-theistic through and through. Many people say that early Buddhism was non-theistic but the development of Mahayana and Vajrayana brought a theistic and even polytheistic influence into Buddhism. However, I don't think that is true. Devotion to the guru does play an immense role in this type of practice, especially within the Mahamudra tradition, but as you progress on this path you realize that the guru is only a representation of your own mind-as-such. We need someone to relate to at the beginning, but once we go through the whole practice, we realize the guru is only a representation of your mind-as-such. Mind-as-such is called "the ultimate guru." The ultimate guru is you. The external guru is only a spokesperson for that. It always comes back to the individual in Buddhism.

Student: Does this have a practical application? Can you use this knowledge to control the phenomenal world?

Rinpoche: No, I don't think it would enhance your

control of the phenomenal world, but it would definitely enhance your understanding of the phenomenal world. By changing your perspective and understanding the nature of mind, you begin to understand the world better.

STUDENT: You can't actually change the world?

RINPOCHE: I don't think so. Otherwise, you would be able to intervene in other people's karmic chain reactions, which is impossible. Even the buddhas cannot do that. Meditation is to go beyond time. Normally the time situation is so important to us, but when we meditate we become less and less conscious of time and start moving into another dimension of experience. Precognition and that kind of thing come about due to moving beyond a linear concept of time. When we see everything in a linear sense, precognition is impossible.

STUDENT: If we must continue in samsara, what are we aiming to do?

RINPOCHE: You are aiming to see samsara as nirvana, or to see samsara as completely pure from the beginning. You begin to see both samsara and nirvana as perfect, right from the beginning, and develop pure perception. You are not necessarily committed to continuing after that; it is up to you. What continues is known as buddha activity. You continue with full deliberation, rather than through compulsion. Normally, we take rebirth out of compulsion, but if you are enlightened you take rebirth with full deliberation as a deliberate choice.

STUDENT: Is it possible to choose extinction deliberately?

RINPOCHE: Yes, it is possible to make that choice, but once you have attained realization your concern for others would be so great that you would want to continue to interact

with others. You would continue to do that indefinitely. You do not have to, but I think you would nonetheless, because of your compassion.

STUDENT: Do all buddhas have the ability to teach or do some have different abilities?

RINPOCHE: The buddhas might not teach Buddhism in the future. They may do something else. Seriously, it depends on situations. Buddhas are supposed to have many abilities or styles of doing things, which are unique to a particular time and age. So buddhas would not necessarily engage in Buddhist teachings in the future. A buddha might do something that we find completely shocking, but if we hang around, we might realize that buddhas do such things. It would be that particular Buddha's style of teaching in that particular age and time. That is what a buddha's skillful means is all about.

Many questions were put to the Buddha concerning his existence after death, but all Buddha really said was, "don't worry too much about it." It is said that buddhas can interact and teach in different ways, that they do not have to give teachings as we understand them. However, even buddhas cannot interfere with someone else's karma. Buddhas can encourage people to stop their habitual patterns, but they cannot interfere by purifying their karma. Karma is up to each individual to work out. Otherwise, Buddha would have worked out people's karma a long time ago. The Dalai Lama could just wave his peacock feather and purify our karma.

STUDENT: Does the practice of *tonglen* or "giving and taking," affect another person?

RINPOCHE: No, the practice of tonglen only purifies you. It would not necessarily do anything to the other person.

Your own heroism in thinking that you could actually accept somebody else's neurosis is an amazingly healthy attitude, and through it you will begin to work through many of your own neurotic tendencies. The practice is beneficial for you rather than beneficial to someone else. Gradually and indirectly, it might affect the other person, but when you are doing it, it is you who gets the benefit. It is the same with prayer. Prayers for others might have some effect, but not necessarily. You would get more benefit out of praying than the person you are praying for, but the person you are praying for may pick up something. It depends upon how open they are. If we are open to the Buddha's teachings, we receive those teachings and we make progress. If we are not open to them, those teachings would make no difference to us even if the Buddha were living next door.

STUDENT: What about pujas that are done when someone dies? Is that for the benefit of the person who has died or is it for your own benefit?

RINPOCHE: Pujas are for the benefit of the person who has died. Although this is a personal statement, I think pujas are more a Tibetan cultural ritual than anything else. Nowhere else is there such a thing. In Bhutan it is done differently. They make a zombie of the dead person, then place food and things in front of it and say, "Have your last meal." They cook the best dishes, serve the finest wine, and say, "Enjoy yourself." This ritual has nothing to do with Buddhism; it is something the Bhutanese have been doing for a long time. They simply composed texts with some Buddhist concepts thrown in and performed the ritual.

Pujas would have some effect if the dead person were a Buddhist, because that person would be receptive and open to the ritual. However, they would have no affinity to the ritual if they were not Buddhist. A cultural association

would make some difference to the person who is dead. The *Tibetan Book of the Dead* or *Bardo Thodrol* relies very heavily on the Bon tradition—the pre-Buddhist Tibetan religion—but it is still quite an amazing text. I think it works and is really useful. As far as other pujas and things done for people are concerned, it depends upon the affinity of the person, their cultural background and all the rest of it. It really comes back to Buddha's teaching: unless you work out your own karma, no one else can do it for you.

STUDENT: In the relationship between mind and mind-as-such, the understanding of the Yogacara and Mahamudra traditions seem to be irreconcilably different.

RINPOCHE: Both traditions acknowledge the fact that mind by nature is fundamentally pure. The general Buddhist understanding is that mind gets transformed into wisdom. Wisdom takes place when the mind stops, whereas according to both Yogacara and Mahamudra, the wisdom aspect has existed right from the beginning. The *Bodhicharyavatara*, a Madhyamaka text, says, "Cessation of the mind is the attainment of dharmakaya (the optimum level of being)." However, according to both Yogacara and Mahamudra, that is not the case. It is not the case that mind ceases and then wisdom arises; wisdom has been there right from the beginning. Mind is pure by nature. No obscuration has been able to corrupt that. That is the similarity between the two traditions. The difference between them is that the Yogacarins tend to substantialize that notion of the purity of mind, while Mahamudra does not attribute characteristics to mind-as-such, apart from saying that it is empty, luminous, and blissful. They say that ultimately you cannot really talk about it very much; you have to experience it. In addition, the obscurations are seen as part of the mind-as-such.

However, without the concept of buddha nature, mind-as-such would not have come about. There are these

differences, but if the Yogacara and Mahamudra were identical, the latter would not have become an independent tradition. The Yogacarins talked about four types of wisdom, and Mahamudra talks about five types of wisdom, but if the Yogacarins did not introduce the notion of wisdoms in the first place, Mahamudra would not have come up with the idea of a fifth wisdom. Even tantra would not have come up with the different wisdoms.

STUDENT: Devotion seems to be about projecting our own sense of purity onto another being, without really seeing the guru's purity.

RINPOCHE: In the context of Mahamudra, devotion is quite different. Devotion is not there because you are going to be saved by someone else. You are trying to humble yourself by generating devotion to a guru. It is not that you are nothing and the guru is everything, the guru is there to make you realize how dignified you are. It is the guru's job to make the practitioner realize his or her own elegance and dignity. The practitioner does not become increasingly dependent on the guru and break down when the guru dies. The practitioner realizes the guru is really a representation of his or her own pure state of mind. The guru acts as the pointer to that.

Notions of Absolute Reality

We have discussed how ordinary consciousness is transformed into a higher level of consciousness and we have talked about buddha nature and mind-as-such. We will now compare the Yogacara notion of absolute reality with the Mahamudra notion of it. Mahamudra, as you will remember, means the same thing as absolute reality. All the philosophical concepts of Yogacara were presented within the format of meditation and practitioners were to understand reality on four different levels, even though they were dealing with the same reality.

The first level is called *upalambha prayoga*. On that level, the meditator or Yogacara practitioner begins to turn his or her attention from outwards to inwards. He or she begins to look at the inner mental processes, of thoughts, images and so on, and realizes the workings of mind: how the mind operates, how the mind understands different things, how thoughts and images come about. In short, the practitioner begins to realize what mind is, what consciousness is. That is the first stage of the practitioner's relationship to reality.

That leads to the second level, which is called *anupalambha prayoga*. Once the meditator begins to understand Yogacara philosophy properly, he or she realizes the physical objects or the sensory perceptions that we have are totally mediated. We have no understanding or

contact at all with reality "as it is." What we are in immediate contact with at all times is our own constructions of the phenomenal world. We have no direct understanding of the phenomenal world. At that point, the practitioners begin to realize the object does not exist. Their realization consists of the nonexistence of the object.

First, we realize the workings of the mind and second, we begin to realize that the objects we experience are not direct perceptions; they are only subjective thought-constructions of sensory presentations. That leads to the third level, which is *upalambhanupalambha prayoga*. At that point, the practitioner begins to realize that both subject and object do not exist. As far as our mental processes are concerned, there is only vikalpa. There are only the traces and dispositions that are our own creation. Since the objects we understand are also a construction of our own vikalpa, subject and object do not exist. Both of them are just subjective constructions rather than actual real existences.

That leads to the final stage, which is *nopalambhopalambha prayoga*. We finally begin to realize the absence of the duality of subject and object does not lead to total nihilism or the nonexistence of things, but to direct contact with the reality of the phenomenal world; to tattva, or tathata, or shunyata. *Tattva* means "thatness," but we can call it emptiness as well.

That is reality. Reality reveals itself, once the subject and object constructions are removed from it. The meditator begins to realize that subject and object are imposed upon reality through our own conceptual paraphernalia and traces and dispositions.

As we have said, in the Yogacara system, emptiness does not just mean empty of inherent existence or substantiality. Emptiness is perceived as a residue of some sort. Once subject and object are removed, there is something left behind. That which is left behind is emptiness.

That is a particularly peculiar characteristic of Yogacara philosophy. In certain Buddhist schools, that would be seen as totally spurious or superfluous. When Yogacarins talk about emptiness, they always use the expression "that which remains" *(avasista)*.

That is a unique feature of the Yogacarin presentation of emptiness, because emptiness is normally understood as a complete negation or a completely negative term rather than something positive. Here, once subject and object are negated, emptiness, which is reality, is affirmed in its place. A short passage from the *Madhyantavibhanga* says, "Truly, the characteristic of emptiness is nonexistence of the duality of subject and object, and the existence of that nonexistence."

"The existence of that nonexistence" is reality. Duality is removed, but emptiness itself is another kind of existence. This is a contradiction in terms, from a logical point of view, but that is how it is expressed. Yogacarins would say that logic has no place when it comes to describing reality. That is how Yogacarins understood emptiness. After going through those four stages of meditation or four ways of knowing, the practitioner realizes that type of emptiness, which is reality itself, once dualistic fixation is removed.

We can switch to the Mahamudra conception of emptiness. According to the Mahamudra tradition, emptiness is presented in a positive form, but it is slightly modified. It is not identical with the Yogacara notion. Mahamudra goes along with the Yogacara notion of emptiness as a positive concept and also says that emptiness or reality does not contain duality of any kind. Duality is not obtainable on the level of reality, but as we discovered, the Mahamudra concepts of co-emergence and the unity between polar opposites is so important, it is said that duality is also pervaded by emptiness.

Duality is pervaded by reality because reality is all-encompassing. There cannot be anything extrinsic to reality,

so duality must be pervaded by reality itself. Both contain one-flavoredness *(ekarasa* or *ro chig)*. Duality is not removed. Duality is incorporated into reality. It is not as if reality is hiding behind the phenomenal world and our experience of the phenomenal world, in terms of subject and object, but our experience of subject and object is pervaded by the phenomenal world. With the concept of one-flavoredness, it is said one should not look for emptiness or thusness hiding behind the phenomenal world as an occult entity.

The mahamudra practitioner has to realize the indivisibility of reality and the phenomenal world. The phenomenal world is not rejected in order that we may come in contact with reality; the phenomenal world itself is seen as another aspect of reality. They are two sides of the same coin. That is the concept of one-flavoredness. Emptiness, which cannot be separated from the phenomenal world, is self-existing *(lhun grub)*. It does not depend upon causes and conditions and is entirely unconditioned. That type of emptiness is again very much a Yogacarin concept. Normally, emptiness is not seen as self-existing. Emptiness does not exist, so how could it be self-existing? However, in the tantric or Mahamudra tradition, it is expressed as self-existing.

Emptiness or thusness is also called "ever-perfect emptiness." One-flavoredness comes about because ever-perfect emptiness pervades everything. That is a Mahamudra term and it is not used in any other context. It is not even used by the Yogacarins. "Ever-perfect emptiness" is *rnam kun mchog ldan gyi stong pa nyid*. All this means is that emptiness is such a positive thing; it has been perfect right from the beginning. Reality has been coexistent with the phenomenal world, but reality itself has not been embellished by the phenomenal world. That is why emptiness has been ever perfect. Ever-perfect emptiness pervades everything—samsara, nirvana, good, bad, and all the rest of it.

There is no distinction whatsoever and that distinctionlessness is one-flavoredness.

If we ask, "What is the one-flavor?" The answer would be the ever-perfect emptiness. One-flavor is the ever-perfect emptiness. From a clear mountain stream to sewage, everything is pervaded by ever-perfect emptiness, so they have one-flavor, which is ever-perfect emptiness.

We discover then that there are some similarities between the Yogacarin and Mahamudra concepts of emptiness. There is also some dissimilarity. In the Yogacara system, duality has to be removed because it is obscuring reality. Duality is something that needs to be dispensed with. In the Mahamudra tradition, duality is not to be removed. Duality has to be seen as the other side of the coin. Mahamudra practitioners would say that trying to remove duality is another dualistic mentality. We are just trying to separate reality from the phenomenal world or to see dualism and reality in a dualistic way. Instead of seeing them as two, one has to see them as one-flavored. Traces and dispositions, conceptual paraphernalia and all the rest of it are also seen as another aspect of wisdom rather than as something different from wisdom. According to Mahamudra, all these dualities exist only in the aspect of actuality, but not in terms of facticity. In actuality, there is that distinction of duality, but in facticity, they are just one-flavored.

Questions and Answers

Student: Would you say that in the Mahamudra tradition, one-flavor becomes the experience of meditation, instead of the four levels of Yogacara?

Rinpoche: Yes, in Mahamudra tradition, practitioners do not have to go through that process in some sense. They have to realize one-flavoredness right from the beginning. In doing meditation, it is said that we should regard the mind

in movement and the mind at rest as the same. If your mind is disturbed during meditation or if your mind is at rest, you just regard it as such, leave it at that, and see the one-flavoredness. If you have a thought about murdering someone or if you suddenly get inspired by seeing an image of the Buddha in your head, these are also seen as one-flavored. It is to be approached that way right from the beginning.

STUDENT: How do you carry that out in daily life?

RINPOCHE: Our own traces and dispositions make us say, "Well, if there is no ultimate good and ultimate bad, why can't we just go out and do whatever we feel like doing?" That is regressing to our habitual patterns, not transcending them. If there is no ultimate good and ultimate bad, why should we choose the bad? It is a question of transcendence, rather than indulgence.

STUDENT: Could you liken perfect emptiness to a lake in which quite a few fish are swimming about creating a bit of flurry but not disturbing the lake?

RINPOCHE: The ocean and its waves is a very important image in Mahamudra literature. They use that particular image to describe the relationship between reality and the phenomenal world. Normally, what we perceive is only the waves. We never understand the depth of the ocean. Instead of saying, "Well, the waves can be dispensed with, they haven't any reality because reality is hiding behind the phenomenal world," we are saying, "The waves do not matter; I need to go to the depth of the ocean." They are the same; they have one-flavor. The waves are permeated by the ocean itself. The ocean and the waves cannot be separated. They are the same thing, which is one-flavored. The depth of the ocean is always still. I will read this passage, which is a commentary on Saraha's songs:

> Although the water of the ocean, which turns everything salty, is not suited to be drunk because it makes one sick, it is fit for drinking when it has lost its saltiness and has become sweet after it has been absorbed by a cloud, carried over the sky and has fallen down again as rain, which has eight properties.
>
> The eight properties are a standard description of drinking water by the Indians. They are the coolness, sweetness, digestiveness, softness, clearness, free from impurities, soothing to the stomach, and clearing the throat.
>
> Similarly, although a man who thoroughly understands the existential mode of reality may seem to do a great variety of good and evil to help others, the poison of covetous thought for essential objects has become like nectar, because it has been neutralized in the sphere of radiant light. When he understands that there is no real foundation for poison seeming to be nectar, he should not be reproached for any action.

That is more or less a description of what a person does when he understands the relationship between the phenomenal world and reality. For him, there is no absolute good and absolute evil. It is like the vapor from the ocean, which has produced drinking water but is no longer salty. In a similar way, all the vikalpa and traces and dispositions are transformed so our actions are no longer tainted by our emotional imbalance and intellectual bewilderment. However, we should remind ourselves that you cannot just be a tantrika. You need all kinds of training behind it and these things are only done by exceptional beings.

The idea of something that remains is dispensed with in Mahamudra literature. They retain the positive quality of shunyata, but they do not say shunyata is left behind as a residue when subject and object are removed. In the Mahamudra tradition, subject and object are an integral part of reality. Reality permeates everything, so they have one-flavor. That is how they overcome that difficulty. The Yogacara system would really have great difficulties in explaining what the whole thing is all about. That has been a real target for all kinds of criticism, both from Buddhists and non-Buddhists.

STUDENT: That means that the last group of people who were Yogacara practitioners in Tibet were the Jonangpas and they were closed down in the seventeenth century.

RINPOCHE: The Jonang tradition was the only tradition that really stuck to Yogacara through and through. They also made a big deal out of buddha nature and were criticized for ontologizing the concept of buddha nature. A lot of Kagyupas and Nyingmapas still rely fairly heavily on the Yogacara system, but not fully. Yogacara as a system is not practiced, or even taken fully, by any of the Tibetan schools. Kagyupas and Nyingmapas accept the three levels of consciousness and the notion of the alayavijnana, but they do not ontologize the notion of buddha nature or shunyata. It is not seen as something that is left behind, that is pure and that exists as a separate thing. It is understood as another aspect of the phenomenal world rather than a reality left behind when the phenomenal world is removed.

STUDENT: Could you explain how conceptual paraphernalia are seen as wisdom?

RINPOCHE: Mind-as-such, which is distinguished from mind, is the subjective aspect and is all-pervasive. Since

mind-as-such is all-encompassing, it must encompass neuroses, confusions, and conceptual paraphernalia. They are regarded as an integral part of mind-as-such. Emptiness does not exclude the phenomenal world and neither does mind-as-such (the wisdom aspect of our mind) exclude confusion and emotional instability. Fundamentally, confusions are pervaded by wisdom or mind-as-such. It is due to our own habitual way of acting that we make a wrong assessment of our confusion, which makes it impossible for us to see the other aspect, which is mind-as-such. On the subjective side, we have mind-as-such as a reality, and the three levels of consciousness as mind. On the objective side, we have emptiness and the phenomenal world. The phenomenal world and emptiness are correlated, and mind-as-such and conceptual paraphernalia (which consists of the three levels of consciousness) are correlated. This is still a logical explanation because it just means that whatever is real must be all-encompassing and if it is all-encompassing it must pervade what is not real as well. Otherwise, reality would have a limitation and the limitation would be that it is not able to encompass what is not real. Since reality has no limitation, it has to be able to encompass what is not real.

STUDENT: People might look at Sartre's *Being and Nothingness,* his major treatise on existentialism, and see that as reality where being and nothingness are two sides of the coin.

RINPOCHE: That is quite true, but Sartre said that being was to be regarded as the world and nothingness was to be regarded as consciousness. He said consciousness is nothing and that consciousness is always trying to become unconscious. Consciousness is fundamentally unhappy. It is nothing, but it is always trying to become something, like a table or chair because a table just is, a chair just is. Consciousness is always striving to be something other than what it is. The interaction between being and nothingness

consists of reality. He called the world "being itself" and consciousness "being for itself," so the interaction between the two consists of that. In Marxism, that situation is translated into political terms. Consciousness is the master and the object is the slave, so the master is always trying to oppress the slave but cannot. That dialectical process is set up again. Sartre's notion of nothingness seems to be quite different from the Buddhist notion of emptiness. Emptiness really means being without substance.

STUDENT: Did Buddha become Buddha when he stopped and sat under a tree?

RINPOCHE: Yes, in some ways. Until then, he was dissatisfied with himself. He was constantly searching for someone to come along and go zap and say, "Finally, I've been enlightened by this guy." It did not happen that way so he chose to just sit down and work with himself rather than try to acquire some gadgetry from someone else. Finally, when it clicked, it clicked because he was able to sit with himself instead of searching and searching, which could have been an endless process. It could have just led him nowhere, because he could have learned this, that, and the other thing, he could have gone from one place to the other, followed this person or the other, but his realization came along when he just made friends with himself and related to himself.

STUDENT: Do you think an understanding of the endless moment or the eternal now is helpful?

RINPOCHE: Yes, because being in the eternal now is a way of overcoming conceptual paraphernalia, which consists of notions of time and space and all the rest of it. When you are in the now, you transcend time. It is true, you know. When you are really in the now, you do not think in terms

of past, present, and future. The whole sense of linear time dissolves. It is not just a theory. You can experience it that way. Sometimes, when you are like that, you discover that five hours have passed, but you need a watch to tell you that, because as far as your experience goes, there is no time. It is not even eternity, in some sense, because eternity is also time. It is a completely timeless experience. That is overcoming conceptual paraphernalia in the ultimate sense.

STUDENT: In practical situations, the need to make a choice must inevitably arise.

RINPOCHE: The choice would be that which benefits others, not necessarily as a moral imperative situation but because being compassionate is the way to become a total human being and help others along the way. That would not necessarily be seen as doing good because doing good would be conceptual paraphernalia. But still, the person would continue to benefit others. Good and bad are relative, anyway. Most moral concepts, in some sense, are quite relative. Therefore, your actions become more spontaneous and more to the point, rather than doing certain things because you have been conditioned that way.

STUDENT: How do we understand cause and effect on this basis of understanding our mind?

RINPOCHE: Cause and effect come about mainly because of conceptual paraphernalia. The whole notion of karma consists of conceptual paraphernalia and traces and dispositions. Due to the traces and dispositions that are left on the substratum of awareness, we compulsively act in different situations. By doing so, we leave more traces and dispositions on the substratum, which in turn propel us to act. That is what the whole karmic cause and effect situation is all about. That comes about because of conceptual

paraphernalia, because of thinking in dualistic terms. Once conceptual paraphernalia is overcome, actions are not motivated by traces and dispositions so action becomes totally to the point, because there is no emotional imbalance or intellectual bewilderment. When actions are not motivated by such states of mind, the karmic chain is not perpetuated as far as psychical processes go. However, as far as physical situations go, cause and effect would still be there because that is intrinsic to the phenomenal world. As far as mental situations go, there would be no psychical determinism.

As long as we are not aware of the process that goes on in our minds in terms of how we accumulate karma and leave traces and dispositions on the substratum of awareness, we will not be able to overcome that process. That is what meditation is all about—overcoming karma altogether so that your action becomes free. You have free choice then. Normally, we do not have any choice. The reason we do not have much choice is not because our freedom has been taken away by someone else, but because we have chosen to bind ourselves. Without knowing the workings of the mind or how the traces and dispositions compel us to act, we are unable to free ourselves. There is a kind of psychic determinism, but meditation frees us of that.

That would not deprive us of our basic decision making. The following is not an authoritative statement, because you have to be there to be authoritative, but what serves as the impetus for you to take a course of action comes about from some kind of evaluation of the situation you are in and from assessing the advantage or disadvantage other people might experience due to your action. Not so much because of you, but how your action is going to benefit or not benefit others. That would not come about due to over-conceptualization. Your mind is transformed by that time and has tremendous clarity and precision and—since you no longer operate in the old habitual way, weighing the pros and cons, which is

crippling—you cannot fail to act. You begin to act more and think less, because you know what to do.

However, that is not easy. As I said, we are talking about exceptional beings here. They have no more traces and dispositions. We do not know whether animals conceptualize or not, but even they can do what is relevant in a certain situation. A mouse does not wander around when the cat is lurking behind the door. It acts and the act is to the point. It does not sit around thinking, "What should I be doing?" A dog knows what to do, and if it does something it should not be doing, it looks really sheepish. All I am trying to say is that you do not have to conceptualize and weigh the pros and cons to be able to act. An enlightened being's action would be absolutely precise and to the point, without their having to over-conceptualize or ask, "What should I be doing and what shouldn't I be doing?" They do not end up a cripple who cannot make up their mind about what they want to do. That is a human problem, I think.

STUDENT: Is the mahamudra experience sudden realization?

RINPOCHE: The whole debate about sudden and gradual enlightenment is just a problem with words. There is no such thing as sudden or gradual enlightenment. In some ways, enlightenment is gradual, and in other ways, it is sudden. When you attain enlightenment, it is not like the sun rising slowly. When you attain final enlightenment, you attain final enlightenment. It is gradual in the sense that you begin to know more and more about yourself as you go along. In all situations it is like that. Zen people say that enlightenment is sudden, but then why did Bodhidharma spend nine years staring at a wall? Nothing just happens immediately. It is the same thing with the practice of mahamudra. Mahamudra, as a practice, is not recommended to everyone. People have to go through different trainings and practices and then begin to practice mahamudra. Otherwise, you

could go berserk and create more mess than you can cope with, which would not be beneficial at all. Mahamudra is not something people can just get into and start playing with. There have to be the right conditions. Mahamudra practitioners and tantrikas in general are the best alchemists because they transmute confusion into wisdom. To do that, you need tremendous proficiency in your art. An ordinary alchemist might kill himself instead of producing the alchemical potion he wants to obtain.

STUDENT: So it is not a matter of understanding whether something is good or bad but whether an action will lead to that result?

RINPOCHE: Mahamudra and tantric practitioners would know immediately. That is the difference. Normally, even our immediate experiences are not immediate, because they are mediated through conceptualization. That is what conceptual paraphernalia is. If you are in total contact with reality as it is, all the time, your actions are going to be much more precise. As we discovered through the Yogacara system, what we are immediately in contact with is nothing other than our own conceptual construction of a particular phenomenon. We do not experience the physical phenomenal world immediately at all. What we are in immediate contact with is our own subjective construction of what is there, rather than what is there immediately. Likes and dislikes are also created by you. Good and bad are not basic properties of reality because we might say this particular chair is better than the other one, but that quality does not belong to the chair in the way that the shape of the chair belongs to the chair. Whether something is good or bad is a decision made by us.

STUDENT: You hear much more about Madhyamaka than Yogacara. How does Madhyamaka relate to tantra?

RINPOCHE: That is a very difficult question. For one thing, when Madhyamaka and Yogacara developed as separate schools in India, tantra was not known. It may have existed as a local cult or something like that, but not as a philosophical system. Buddhist tantra is really a philosophical system, independent of the Mahayana. It has its own unique features. The way the Tibetan Buddhist schools approach tantra really depends on the schools themselves, on how they interpret the original tantric texts. It depends to what extent a particular school is influenced by either Yogacara or Madhyamaka. All schools of Tibetan Buddhism would rely very heavily on Madhyamaka, but very few rely on Yogacara. None of them would rely on Yogacarin concepts completely. As we can see, there have been modifications here and there.

STUDENT: Yet so much of it is so similar.

RINPOCHE: That is why I decided we should talk about this. For scholars this would be of tremendous interest, but as Buddhist practitioners it is also interesting to look at, because we begin to see how certain tantric concepts emerged out of other concepts that were dormant or implicit, or maybe even explicit, but not elaborated upon. Madhyamaka has had an equal influence on Buddhist tantra. We could trace that back too, but that would be outside the scope of this particular course. The relationship between Yogacara and tantra has never really been talked about, even by the Tibetans for some reason. After Kamalashila's visit to Tibet, Yogacara as a system really fell into disfavor in the eyes of most Tibetans. The Nyingma and Kagyu schools would have some respect for Yogacara, but they would rather say their systems are a synthesis of Madhyamaka and Yogacara rather than proper Yogacara. Even they criticize certain aspects of Yogacara philosophy in their treatises.

STUDENT: The problem is that we identify ourselves with confusion without recognizing that we can see confusion and therefore have wisdom.

RINPOCHE: That is why it is said that mahamudra is all-encompassing. It encompasses your starting point, your path, and your goal all at once. To talk about it as a practice and to talk about it in other contexts is really quite different. As a practice, we need to see confusion and wisdom as one-flavored rather than trying to see wisdom and not see confusion.

STUDENT: Would spontaneous action be based on an awareness of suffering in others?

RINPOCHE: Yes, and also their confusion, the mire that people succumb to in some sense. That becomes an impetus for you to act, but it is not pity. Enlightened beings do not act because they feel pity for others; they feel some kind of basic concern of other people's well-being. Pity would be some kind of sentimental approach. You feel good when whatever you do benefits others, but you feel bad when you think you are not getting anywhere in helping others. With this basic concern or compassion for others, you are just concerned about their basic well-being and not much concerned with how much the person is benefiting or how many people have benefited from your compassion. You just do it for others. In tantra especially, the basis for that would be the other person's basic intelligence, mind-as-such or buddha nature. You recognize the potential enlightenment of that person. It is not that this person is really pitiable, but that the person could be dignified through acknowledging his own buddha nature. In order to do that, you begin to interact with the person and cultivate compassion, which is freed from sentimentality.

Summary

We are going to summarize the Yogacara impact on Buddhist tantra and wind up our discussion. The fact should be re-emphasized that both the Yogacara and Mahamudra traditions place a great deal of importance on mind. It is said that unless we understand our mind, there is absolutely no hope for us to attain liberation, absolutely no hope. We could accumulate good karma or participate in all kinds of rituals, we could do things that are of benefit to others and yet not understand our own mind. If that is the case, liberation becomes impossible. So understanding our own mind is regarded as of foremost importance. The mind is also regarded as something that constitutes samsara and nirvana, subject and object. Normally, when we talk about mind, we feel we are referring to the subject. However, as we discovered, even our experiences of objects are constructed and constituted by mind. So the mind is regarded as the most important thing for a practitioner to realize.

According to Yogacara and Mahamudra, our experience of the world consists of the interactions between the three levels of consciousness. Our experience of the world—be it subject and object, samsara and nirvana—is constructed by the mind. The whole experience of the phenomenal world could be regarded as a creation of the mind.

This emphasis on the mind has led many people to feel that Yogacarins are propounding some form of idealism, which means the world is nothing but mind. Berkeley said, "To be is to be perceived," so some people have thought the Yogacarins are saying a similar thing. As we discovered, our experience of subject and object may be constructed by mind, but reality itself is not constructed by mind or there would be no reality. If there is nothing other than our own mind, reality would be totally relative to our experience. If reality is relativized, it is no reality at all, because it would depend on our moods, emotions, thought processes and way of seeing things. Reality would have to conform to our experiences, but that is not so. Things as they are have nothing to with our way of perceiving them.

Once the experience of subject and object is removed, reality reveals itself. The practitioner no longer constructs subject and object onto reality. Reality is totally freed from that type of vitiation, the taint that has been imposed by the conceptual paraphernalia of the subject. On the subjective side, the person begins to realize buddha nature, which is our absolute optimum level of being. On the objective side, there is realization of *tattva*, "thusness," things as they are. It is a higher level of seeing things, a higher level of relating to the phenomenal world. To say Yogacarins believe the world is nothing but a creation of the mind is to miss the point.

We first have to turn our mind to thought processes and images and then we begin to discover that our experience of objects is also constructed by our own mind. The practitioner begins to realize that subject and object do not exist; they are created by the mind. When we realize this and the notion of subject and object are removed, reality reveals itself. What is created by the mind is the notion of subject and object, which consists of conceptual paraphernalia. It has nothing to do with things as they exist in themselves.

The reason so much emphasis is placed on the mind is because we know very little about how things exist. What we are in immediate contact with, all the time, is our own conception of what we are experiencing. That is why the mind is said to play a very important role in our relationship with the phenomenal world.

Questions and Answers

Student: How does the mind become transformed?

Rinpoche: In the Yogacara system, transformation is talked about as a total metamorphosis. The confused aspect of your mind is one thing and the enlightened aspect of that same psychological makeup is quite different. Transformation takes place, and we could say that transformation takes place in the aspect of facticity as well. In Mahamudra, when they talk about transformation, it not so much about transforming one thing into something else, but about realizing the real nature of what you are actually transforming. There is absolutely no difference between the confused state and the enlightened state, as far as facticity is concerned. The difference exists in actuality. When we are not enlightened, we cannot say we are enlightened. There is that difference, but in facticity, there is no difference because realization of the confused state of mind is realization of the enlightened state of mind. In the Mahamudra tradition, transformation is more like a proper assessment of your state of mind, rather than changing one thing into something else. You begin to understand your confused state of mind better, which in itself is the discovery of wisdom or the enlightened state of mind; you do not leave something behind and get into something else.

Student: Does a person become wise through studying or through meditating?

RINPOCHE: First, you have to find out how the three levels of consciousness interact. You just observe. It is not difficult. We might not directly experience the substratum of awareness, but we can have some notion of what psychologists call "mnemonic mass," some kind of memory bank. You know your habitual processes influence your actions, and at the same time, you know you view things from the point of view of subject and object, which is termed *egocentric mentation*. There is no problem with knowing empirical consciousness, because if it were not there, we would not experience thoughts, images, and all the rest of it.

You just observe how those three levels of consciousness are interacting and then you come to a point where you might be able to stop supplying the substratum of awareness with traces and dispositions. That is what meditation is all about and that can be done only if you suspend time in some sense. In meditation, when you are being in the now, that nowness is an experience of timelessness. If you are totally in the now, you do not even think, "I am in the now." If you get into meditation properly, sometimes you get surprised that so much time has passed. Your notion of time is not there, which in fact, is creating a kind of gap in the mental processes that leave traces and dispositions on the substratum of awareness. That is what meditation is for: to exhaust the substratum of awareness of all its traces and dispositions. Once you have done that, you acknowledge the fact that the substratum of awareness is mirror-like wisdom. It begins to manifest as mirrorlike wisdom, whereby you no longer construct subject and object and impose that onto reality. You just see reality as it is, just as a mirror reflects things as they are.

STUDENT: It has always worried me that poets and artists have tried to freeze things.

RINPOCHE: The artistic vision, in some sense, could be said

to be a manifestation of mirrorlike wisdom. A lot of the time, people get that sort of inspiration only when they see things in totality. When they do not see the fragments of things, but when they see things in their totality. Mystical vision is the same. Mystic experience always consists of seeing things in totality. I forget the Christian mystic's name, but one day he was climbing a mountain and was suddenly overwhelmed by this vision. He even used the words "he saw things as they are," that he almost could see the depth of things rather than just the surface. There was no conceptual paraphernalia taking place, his vision was so intense. Afterwards, since he was a Christian, he talked about his experience in relation to Christian terms. He felt that he actually could experience the presence of God. However, his vision did not have anything to do with Christianity as such.

STUDENT: Would it be impossible for an outsider to read or look at such artistic expressions and intuit the same things. It must be impossible to pick up the original inspiration.

RINPOCHE: That is precisely right. In Buddhism, it is said you do not talk too much about your experience, because if you talk and conceptualize about it too much, you will lose it. Then you can only marvel at the experience you had, but you cannot recapture it any more, because you have conceptualized about it so much. You can talk about it only when you have really experienced it and when that experience becomes quite persistent. People might have a flash of some kind and feel ecstatic about it, then they immediately want to go out and tell everyone what they have experienced. They just go on telling everyone, even after twenty years. It becomes useless.

STUDENT: Art is a reminder that such experiences are possible or that such a view of the world is possible.

RINPOCHE: All that is very true, but if you experience or glimpse what enlightenment is all about and immediately go out and try to convey that to others, it becomes an obstacle for you. When your experience of enlightenment becomes much more real and persistent and you try to convey that to others, there are no emotional overtones involved. You are genuinely concerned with the well-being of other. When you try to convey that, it has nothing to do with trying to impress others with your experiences or with thinking that others should be experiencing what you have experienced.

Buddhas or highly realized beings can talk about those things, but if immature meditators try to do the same, it becomes an obstacle for them. Instead of benefiting anyone, it even becomes harmful to the person who is trying to convey it. Milarepa's enlightenment became a persistent experience. It was not as if he had a flash and then started singing songs and trying to get people into the same trip. He meditated for a long time until his enlightened experience became real. He persisted with his practice. But these days, someone who has discovered how to buy a new toothbrush will start writing a book.

STUDENT: Objects are all the same, but we do have this notion of sacred and profane, which creates a situation of duality, even in Buddhism.

RINPOCHE: It is not just the notion of sacred and profane, it is also the notion of saying insignificant things are completely worthless and ignoring them. If we look at mystical experiences or people who have achieved enlightenment, they get inspired by a blade of grass. Just a pebble on the road begins to assume such tremendous importance for those people. That is mirrorlike wisdom. Objects are reflected onto consciousness as they are and then everything is sacred. That is what sacred outlook or pure perception means. Pure perception covers both significant and

insignificant things. Normally, our whole notion is completely subjective, so sometimes certain things have importance for us and other times they do not. If we go window shopping we want to possess everything, but if we buy everything and bring it home, we do not want to look at it. Those things become a nuisance because they take up so much space. It happens like that all the time.

STUDENT: Are the wisdoms reality or do they produce tattva?

RINPOCHE: Wisdom is the reality of the subject and tattva is reality of the object. Wisdom is the subjective aspect and tattva is the objective aspect. You no longer see objectivity as a product of the mind. You see the non-duality of subject and object, which is tattva. Wisdom is the subjective side, nonetheless. When you begin to discover your wisdom, you begin to see tattva, you begin to see reality. As long as you have not discovered your wisdom, you cannot see reality. You can call it luminosity, you can call it mind-as-such, you can call it buddha nature or you can call it wisdom. They all refer to the same thing. On the objective side you have tattva, mahamudra, or things as they are.

STUDENT: I don't understand how the objective side of ultimate experience is not dependent on mind yet the subjective side is.

RINPOCHE: No, the subjective aspect is wisdom and the objective aspect is things as they are. Reality cannot be constructed by the mind. Otherwise, reality would be different for every person. If it were constructed by each individual mind, reality must manifest as a different thing for different people, but that is not the case. Reality is completely free from our conceptual paraphernalia on that level. We could say that when you have just mind you see samsara, you see the phenomenal world. When your mind becomes

mind-as-such, you see reality; you see *tattva* or "things as they are." It is as simple as that. Mind corresponds to the phenomenal world and mind-as-such corresponds to things as they are. As long as your conceptual mind is operating, you cannot see tattva. As soon as your conceptual mind is overcome and your mind begins to manifest as wisdom or mind-as-such, you begin to see things as they are. You begin to see tattva; you begin to see mahamudra.

STUDENT: Are essence of one's mind and the essence of the phenomenal world the same?

RINPOCHE: They are the same in terms of our experience. We no longer see things in terms of subject and object; that is the difference. However, that does not mean that reality and you are identical. There is no numerical oneness. You and reality cannot become one. If that were the case, we would run into all kinds of problems. If you and reality were one, you would become one with a nuclear bomb. You would have full control over the whole situation, but that is not true. Your perception of the world could be one however. Your perception of the world could be such that you no longer see reality and the phenomenal world as something separate from you.

STUDENT: The nuclear bomb actually exists. Nuclear bombs and everything that goes on around us are a manifestation of our group mind. Haven't we actually created all that?

RINPOCHE: No, a buddha is not constructing anything. Since a buddha is enlightened, he would not have any conceptual paraphernalia. He would not be creating atom bombs. However, if he happened to live in an age where there has been nuclear destruction, Buddha would be affected by it. He would still have to participate in that whole thing. Many people think that Eastern

philosophies deny the existence of the world and that reality is the mind, whereas Western philosophies have always expounded some form of materialism or realism. That is not true at all. There have been different forms of idealism in the West. If people say there is no reality except for the mind, this would be a very egocentric statement. It is not particularly Buddhist to say that reality is mind, and that when I discover who I am, the essence of the universe is me. That is more like the Vedanta notion of sat-citananda than the Buddhist notion of reality. Also, if reality were the mind, the mind could do anything.

STUDENT: We have a particular experience and the mind conceptualizes that experience. Then, as far as each individual is concerned, that is our reality.

RINPOCHE: Once we begin to work through our conceptual paraphernalia, everyone's experience of reality would be the same. We do not experience reality as it is, because our perception of the world varies according to the individual. You see things in a particular way and I see things in a particular way. Everyone constructs their own experience in different ways. As we were saying in the first chapter, people see things differently. Creatures with different physical organisms have different experiences of the world. A lot of things are constructed by the mind, but as far as reality goes, it is not constructed by the mind. That is why it is called reality. Otherwise, it would be another subjective construction. That is why reality is *thusness* or "things as they are." It is how things are, not how things seem or how things are experienced. Finally, you begin to see things in their proper perspective, instead of seeing them as constructed by you or dependent upon your own experience.

Time and space, a Buddhist would say, are constructed by the mind. Time and space are not intrinsic to the world

or to reality. What is time? Time is relative to things. This table came into existence at some stage, persists for a while and finally dissolves, so that particular time is dependent upon that particular object. Time in relation to me is dependent upon my experience. There is no such thing as time out there as an independent entity or as a linear process. Time is dependent upon different objects and how they exist. Space is the same. Space is relative to the different positions and locations of different objects. All those things are therefore part of our conceptual paraphernalia. But still, reality is not made by the mind.

STUDENT: If the Buddha was here right now, instead of two thousand five hundred years ago, he would have the same brand of reality?

RINPOCHE: It would still be the same, because reality has to transcend time and space. Otherwise, if reality were in time and space, reality would be the same as our experience of the world, which would be ludicrous. It would not be reality at all.

STUDENT: If a person were fortunate enough to have a brief experience of reality, would it be better not to try and freeze that brief moment but to go on with the practice?

RINPOCHE: Yes, because then you would begin to see things more and more clearly. That is why Buddhists say that whatever you experience in meditation, you should not conceptualize it. Just be and pay more attention to your breath than anything else. Even if you are having visions of a 100,000 thousand buddhas, it does not make any difference. To your meditation, it is nothing. You let it go. You do not go out and write a book about it.

STUDENT: Once I have an opinion about something and

put my subjective thoughts into it, that becomes conceptual paraphernalia and there is no chance of seeing it as it is?

RINPOCHE: Opinions have nothing to do with knowledge. Opinions are the antithesis of knowledge. Opinions and beliefs are what obstruct us from seeing things as they are and stop us from acquiring proper knowledge. Opinions are opinions. They are totally subjective. Your opinion differs from mine and someone else's opinions may differ again. Normally, we think that having an opinion is fantastic; we think it is the same as having knowledge of some kind, but it is not the same.

STUDENT: I have seen the idea of transcending duality described as zeroness rather than oneness. Is that the Madhyamaka view on that?

RINPOCHE: In some ways, that is true, but even for the Yogacarins that would be true. When we talk about oneness, that does not mean you and reality become one. You do not merge into each other. That is just wishful thinking. I think Freud was right when he said many religious people want to merge back into the womb.

STUDENT: Is an essential difference between Yogacara and Madhyamaka philosophy that Madhyamikas see emptiness as empty of everything and Yogacarins saw emptiness as something real?

RINPOCHE: That is true; actually, Madhyamikas demolish everything. You do not have anything to hang onto or anything to stand on. They break the flow and you just fall. With the Yogacarins, it is a bit different. Emptiness in itself is seen as something positive. It is a fine distinction really, but no Buddhist would talk about oneness in a metaphysical sense. Two words that are really important to remember are *advaita* and *advaya*. *Advaita* means "oneness" or "one

without a second" and *advaya* means "not two." To talk about oneness in the metaphysical or numerical sense is really quite dangerous. What about differentiation? What about multiplicity? Multiplicity can be harmonized and unified, but it cannot be reduced to oneness. That would really be to deny the whole thing altogether.

STUDENT: Is emptiness empty in Mahamudra?

RINPOCHE: Yes, emptiness is empty, but emptiness is still a positive concept. It is not a total negation. Normally, emptiness is regarded as a total negation of the inherent existence or substantiality of things.

STUDENT: What about dependent arising? We cannot perceive emptiness without a phenomenal world.

RINPOCHE: Dependent origination *(pratityasamutpada)* is precisely the reason that things are non-substantial. Things are insubstantial because they depend upon each other. Causes and conditions have to come together so there is no absolute in anything.

STUDENT: But the Madhyamaka view is a total negation?

RINPOCHE: Emptiness is regarded as a total negation, that is true, but at the same time, positive and negative are not necessarily meant in the ultimate sense. Madhyamikas, if they are told that they see emptiness as something negative or a total negation, they would say, "Yes, that is our position." They do not see that as negative in the ultimate sense. It is the same with Yogacarins. The Yogacarins were seen as having a philosophical position, whereas the Madhyamikas do not have any philosophical position, especially the prasangika-Madhyamika, which follows Nagarjuna. Nagarjuna said, "I don't have any thesis, no one can criticize me." That is what

Madhyamaka is really. Madhyamikas do not hold onto any particular view, so we cannot say that emptiness is the Madhyamaka viewpoint. Madhyamikas do not have any viewpoint.

The Madhyamikas are not saying the jug doesn't exist; they are saying the jug has no inherent existence. We think it is real, but it is not real in the sense that it is totally absolute without having to depend upon causes and conditions. The jug came about because it was produced by someone. Materials had to be put together and processed and then the jug had to be brought here. Someone had to shape it in such a way that it would be able to hold water. That is what the Madhyamikas are saying. This is what they call dependent arising and this is why emptiness is not nothing. Nothing means vacuity. They are not saying that if you break the jug you end up with nothing. They make it clear that emptiness does not mean vacuity. Emptiness is just the lack of inherent existence, which means that everything depends upon causes and conditions. Emptiness is not an entity of some kind either. You cannot find emptiness as something separate from the jug. Emptiness is the very lack of substantiality in the jug.

STUDENT: Might the concept of emptiness be expressed as empty so that there is nothing for ego to hold onto?

RINPOCHE: It also offers a dynamic conception of the phenomenal world instead of a static one. Just imagine if everything were real, there would be no movement at all. If nothing depended upon any other thing, if things did not come into being and then go out of existence, there would be no movement. If things were real and had inherent existence, they would not be bound in temporality. There would be no beginning and no end. Things would be static, and if things were static we would not be here. The Madhyamikas are saying that to think that things are

as real as we see them is completely wrong. Emptiness provides flexibility or lubrication, whatever you want to call it, with the phenomenal world. The phenomenal world begins to assume a dynamic conception rather than a static one. Yogacarins borrowed the notion of emptiness from the Madhyamikas. It was the Madhyamikas who came up with that notion and then the Yogacarins modified it to a certain degree. The tantrikas modified it even further.

STUDENT: With regard to all the different views of reality, which view do you personally hold?

RINPOCHE: It is too early for me to hold any view at the moment. My view is really quite open. I like looking at all the Buddhist schools with some kind of openness and learning from them. I do not particularly hold onto any view as such, but I think the Mahamudra viewpoint is really quite good. What Tibetans call "the vastness and profundity of the two traditions of Yogacara and Madhyamaka" are brought into Mahamudra. They are synthesized in the Mahamudra tradition. We did not have time to look at how Madhyamaka influenced Mahamudra, but it had an equal influence. So the vastness of the Madhyamikas and the profundity of the Yogacarins are brought into the Mahamudra tradition.

STUDENT: Under this theory, are we assuming only one objective reality?

RINPOCHE: Yes, but in order to see that reality, in order to apprehend it, you have to develop a special mental faculty. We cannot see reality with our normal consciousness. That is why you need to work through conceptual paraphernalia. Your perception is purified and then you begin to see reality as it is.

STUDENT: And it is one?

RINPOCHE: Yes, reality has to be one. Multiplicity exists only on the phenomena level.

STUDENT: If reality is not subject to causes and conditions, how is it that causes and conditions arose?

RINPOCHE: Due to reality. Reality provides the possibility for phenomena to exist in the first place. Who can say when the whole thing began? First, we would have to find out when the earth came into existence and then we would have to find out how the other planets arose and then the galaxies and so on and so forth. It would lead to regression. Even if we could find out how the whole thing came about, it would still lead further and further backwards, and millions and millions and millions of years backwards. It is of absolutely no relevance at all. Even if we could trace all that, it just does not matter. For a Buddhist, whether God made the world or not does not make much difference.

The only causality we really need to worry about is the twelve *nidanas*, the twelve "dependent originations." Whether or not there is a Mount Meru is not going to make any difference to us. Whether or not there is such a thing as Mount Meru is not going to make me any happier. In the *Abhidharmakosha*, where this whole cosmology is given, there is one sentence at the beginning of the chapter that says, "The whole cosmos is created by one's karma." That is a really interesting statement. That shows that how the cosmos came about is absolutely secondary to our experience of the cosmos, which is due to karma. It is just one single sentence, but it is so important. Otherwise, you could think, "Buddhists believe there are four continents with Mount Meru in the middle, with half of Mount Meru submerged in the ocean and the other half rising upwards,

and it has four sides." You can find that same description in the *Ramayana* of the Hindus. The cosmology is just taken from there and has nothing to do with Buddhism as such. In the *Kalachakra-tantra* a different description of the world or cosmos is given.

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